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Death and Life



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DEATH AND LIFE

SOME LETTERS
FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE OF
A PARISH PRIEST

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according to the subjects dealt with.)

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SERIES I
IN THE MIDST OF LIFE
WE ARE IN DEATH

LETTER I.—*From Mrs Halford, an old
friend and parishioner*

DEAR DR GRAY,

Thank you, with all my heart, for your letter, and your most kind sympathy. Indeed I do believe all you say—at least, I hope I do—but I cannot feel it just now. I don't seem able to *feel* anything; not even sorrow for my boy's death, or pride that he died so bravely, and gave his life for his country.

I cannot bring my mind to grasp the thought that he is dead; it seems simply impossible! It is such a few weeks since we saw him off at Victoria, looking so happy and bright and well, and so full of life and strength and hopes for the future. It seems impossible that all those hopes should be over and done with, and that he is nowhere in this world that one has to go on living in!

Where is he? That is what I long with

all my heart and soul to know, and it seems there is no one to tell me. Or is there some teaching that I have not found, in the Church or Bible, which throws any gleam of light upon this awful mystery of what comes after death?

Why it need be such a mystery is what I cannot help wondering. It would surely help one's faith so much to know where our dear ones are, and what they are doing, and whether they are able to be near us, and how far they can help us, or we them. I can't bring myself to believe that our boy does not want any help from his father and me any longer, and yet, how can we help him, even by our prayers?

I ought not to trouble you with all these questions, only if you could throw any light upon them I should be very thankful. It seems as though all one's faith were so useless here! All the beliefs which I thought I held, about the life after death, seem to have shrivelled up into nothing. At any rate, they don't help me; and as to the "Com-

munions of Saints," which I have professed every day to believe in, I feel that I have not the least idea what it means.

This is a dreadful confession to make, is it not? for I suppose it means that the faith one has professed cannot have been very real, or it would not fail one now. But indeed I do want to make it a reality, if I only can, and that is why I venture to ask if you can think of anything that can help to throw just a little gleam of light upon this awful darkness.

I wonder how many more gallant lives have to be sacrificed, and how many more hearts broken, before this terrible war is done!

Yours very sincerely,

JESSICA HALFORD.

LETTER 2.—*From Dr Gray*

DEAR MRS HALFORD,

You say that you cannot "feel" that what I said in my letter is true. I do not expect you to feel it. Our feelings are not

always the safest guides, especially when we are simply stunned by a great sorrow.

Your son has died the death of a hero. We are all proud of him, but nothing can make up for the loss to you, and that is all that you can grasp as yet. The old life seems to have vanished, and with it have vanished also many of the arguments which you used to think so strong when you tried to comfort others in their sorrow.

Dear friend, be patient, and our Heavenly Father will help you to build them up again. Only don't try to take any short cut to faith. It is the gift of God, and as it was given to you in the old happy days, it will be given back to you again.

You ask if you have missed some teaching of the Church or the Bible about the mystery of life after death, and why it need be such a mystery. Do you remember when your boy broke his leg at his first school, and lost his chance of getting his school colours for football, he asked you (as I remember you told me): "Why, why should this accident

have happened just now ? ” And you told him that there are many questions we cannot answer, and that it must be God’s will for a special purpose. And God enabled you to see later on what the purpose was, for Cecil had been just a little bit spoilt by success, and the quiet time at home just steadied him before he went to Eton, and he began to take more interest in reading so that he got on better with his lessons. And, of course, born athlete as he was, there was no question of winning his colours at Eton and his blue at Cambridge. Poor lad, it was a hard lesson to learn, and it is a harder lesson that you have to learn now.

No one can say “ why ” these mysteries of life and death face us. But the Church points you to our Lord’s words : “ What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” Again : “ In My Father’s house are many mansions.” We are only in the preparatory school in this life, but there is a larger life to come, with larger opportunities. You trusted him with his good house-master at school.

Cannot you trust him with the Lord Jesus Christ ?

You say, how can we help him by our prayers ? Did you doubt it in the old days of the life of temptation ? Why should you doubt it now, in the life perfected ? As he came out of the ordeal with his splendid sense of honour and chivalry untarnished, so he can still "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

If our Lord said to the dying malefactor on the cross beside Him ; "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," may we not cling to this one thought, and keep on saying it : "With Christ," which is "far better" ; "In Paradise," the first resting-place of redeemed souls.

But there will be a great deal to learn. He is only a new boy there as yet. But we can pray for his soul, that the Saviour will give him rest after strife, and grant him in His Light to see light.

You need feel no scruple in praying for him still. I have no doubt that Onesiphorus

was dead when St Paul wrote (2 Timothy i. 16-18) about his household, but of Onesiphorus himself he said only: "The Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day." Such a prayer fits in naturally with the constant Christian practice from the earliest days. They prayed that all who had departed this life in Christ's faith and fear might rest in peace. And it is a real comfort to feel that we are not shut off from this fellowship of prayer for them.

One word more. The "Communion of Saints" means friendship in the family of God. Your boy will find new friends beside him, but he won't forget the old. Cannot you pray that our Heavenly Father will let them help him by their prayers, if in no other way? His favourite saint, when he was a little fellow, was St Andrew, because the name means "manly." I see no reason why St Andrew, or the spirit of some other "just man made perfect" should not be his tutor in the new, strange life. But I come back to the thought, "with Christ," the

King of saints, Who will understand him best of all, and will put him in the way of all that there is for him to learn.

I feel that I have left many things unsaid, and have only badly expressed what I have tried to say. But you and your husband are often remembered in my prayers, and I am convinced that the comfort of the Holy Spirit will mean far more than anything else, both to you and him. Please give him my kindest regards, and believe me,

Yours sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

SERIES II

DEATH AND SIN

Note.—The letters in this section (with the exception of the last two) followed upon a sermon preached by Dr Gray on Advent Sunday, 1915.

LETTER 3.—*From Mrs Butler,
a parishioner*

DEAR DR GRAY,

Will you allow me to thank you for your sermon this morning? It helped me so much, that I am venturing to ask you about one point upon which you did not touch with regard to these splendid men of ours who are laying down their lives for their country. Not all of them have lived good lives, or are what one would ordinarily call "ready to die." A young cousin of my own, who went to the front as a private, after a very discreditable career, has been killed in the act of bringing in some wounded comrades. He quite certainly sacrificed his life to save theirs, and his captain has written his mother a most glowing tribute to his gallantry.

We are all proud and thankful, of course, that he should have died like that, but what

I do so want to be clear about is, how far his death "wipes out" the past. One of his friends used that very phrase about him to me. He said: "What a comfort that poor old Jock had the chance to wipe his slate clean!"

Did he wipe it clean by that gallant death, do you think? Were his "sins, which were many" forgiven, even without his definitely asking for forgiveness, because, at that moment at any rate, he "loved much"? Does the act of death wipe out the past? and if so, how does he start again on the other side? I mean, in what way is his condition, after death, different through his having died for others, from what it would have been if he had been killed, say, in a railway accident?

What did the act of sacrifice do for him? There can hardly have been time for it to change his character, and we do not know how far it even roused him to true penitence. Yet he died like a hero, and one loves to feel that he has therein made atonement for the past. Only, I wonder *how*!

I have asked a great many questions, but, indeed, they are not idle ones ; they trouble me a good deal. That is why I have ventured to write to you, just on the chance that you may have time to throw a little light upon them, to add to the help you gave us all in this morning's sermon.

Thank you again for it, with all my heart.

Yours sincerely,

EDITH BUTLER.

LETTER 4.—*From Dr Gray*

DEAR MRS BUTLER,

One is always grateful for kind words about a sermon if it is shown that a friend has been led to think out a question beyond the point at which the sermon stopped. In this case you raise one of the most difficult problems which the Christian mind can face. I should say insoluble, if we could not believe that the work of Divine Grace in a human soul can be carried on in the unseen world.

It is quite true, is it not ? that death does not change us, though it often reveals what

we really are, for better or for worse. In your cousin's case I feel that we can thank God whole-heartedly for evidence of the capacity of his character for that self-sacrifice. His past faults were obviously sins not only against God but against himself, and all that his friends hoped he would be ; and against society, which is necessarily affected by our conduct ; as St Paul says (Rom. xiv. 7), "None of us liveth to himself." Now it seems to me clear that gallantry such as his does wipe the slate clean in regard of his sin against himself, and against society so far as public opinion has been hurt by his conduct. But it does not by itself touch the deeper question of his influence for evil upon others who may never hear of his death ; nor does it prove that he has turned to God in true penitence. We must look more deeply into the revelation of God's love for an answer to these questionings.

You have almost anticipated what I am going to say. If he had died in a railway accident we should have been forced simply

to commit him to the mercy of God, with the hope that in all the degradation of the past he had had some stirrings of remorse, that the tempter had not had his way with him quite so easily as we feared, and that his will had not been deliberately and finally set against God. But supposing, surviving the accident, he had told rescuers to attend to others first, and even perished in the flames of a burning coach in consequence—should we not be justified in saying that he passed into the presence of God with his bare soul prepared as never before to receive “the truth as it is in Jesus”? “For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

How much more clearly can we understand this in the case of his death out in the battlefield where so many men learn, we know, to pray as never before, and the self-sacrifice for others is much more deliberate and thus nobler.

I often think of the words: “There is only one death-bed repentance recorded in

the Bible ; one lest any should despair, one lest any should presume." But in that case the death-bed was a cross, the cross of the penitent thief. We are certain that no soul which rises to the effort of the prayer, "Lord, remember me," will fail to find in companionship with our Lord in Paradise all the shame and sorrow which true penitence must bring with it.

No one has ever expressed this better than Newman in his "Dream of Gerontius."

"What then—if such thy lot—thou seest thy Judge,
The sight of Him will kindle in thy heart
All tender, gracious, reverential thoughts.
Thou wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him,
And feel as though thou couldst but pity Him,
That one so sweet should e'er have placed Himself
At disadvantage such, as to be used
So vilely by a being so vile as thee.

There is a pleading in His pensive eyes
Will pierce thee to the quick, and trouble thee.
And thou wilt hate and loathe thyself ; for, though
None sinless, thou wilt feel that thou hast sinned,
As never thou didst feel ; and wilt desire
To shrink away, and hide thee from His sight ;
And yet wilt have a longing aye to dwell
Within the beauty of His countenance.

And these two pains, so counter and so keen—
The longing for Him, when thou seest Him not ;
The shame of self at thought of seeing Him—
Will be thy veriest, sharpest purgatory.”

If you say that this applies only to the case of an instructed Christian, dying at the last in faith and supported by the prayers of his Church, I answer: “By what right do we limit this thought?” I might put it more strongly, as Browning does in the “Ring and the Book,” at the end of the Pope’s speech, in words which Bishop Westcott taught me to study years ago :

“So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.”

Surely such thoughts lead us to pray for all souls with a very solemn hope, and we can then dare to hope that souls will be taught when they turn to Christ, our only Saviour, to pray for all those whom they have influenced for evil here upon earth, and find peace in the thought that the Good Shepherd will never leave anyone alone who has not, with full knowledge, rejected Him.

Read Rom. xiv. 9, "For to this end Christ died, and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living." He loved him in all his wanderings, how much more in his gallant death?

Yours very sincerely,
JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 5.—*From Miss Mary Green,
a stranger*

DEAR SIR,

I am venturing to write to you, although a complete stranger, trusting that you will pardon the liberty. I happened to be staying in your neighbourhood last Sunday, and the sermon which I heard you preach has made me long to lay before you a difficulty which troubles me very much.

You spoke of those who are dying for their country, but you did not touch upon the awful problem of those whose death is due not to heroism but to sin. Supposing that some one has done very wrong—very wrong indeed, although, truly, not realising how wrong it was—and has died in consequence; and supposing that there has been no time or possibility of any definite act of penitence, or any spiritual ministrations, but only an acknowledgment of guilt

and of the need of pardon ; I wonder how you would expect that God will deal with that soul after death ?

This is no fancy problem, but one that concerns me most nearly—the being whom I have loved best in all the world has lately died, not in any noble fashion, but as the direct result of sin—committed, I know, partly, at any rate, in ignorance, and acknowledged as sin, in the very few words that could be spoken.

“ I’m afraid I’ve done a very wicked thing. . . . Pray for me. . . . Pray to God for me. . . . Say prayers. . . . More prayers. . . . More. . . . ” I believe that those were literally all the words that were said—that could be said—at long intervals, and more and more faintly in the weakness that came on with such appalling swiftness. There was no time to fetch a clergyman, and besides I was too much occupied, every moment, to think of it. I just said what prayers I could, and a few words of comfort, over and over again, until the end came.

It was quite calm and peaceful—there

was no look of anxiety or fear—but I wondered, and I have been wondering ever since, what happened to that dear soul? Were those few words enough to count as penitence, and gain forgiveness? and—if they were—does it not seem strange that so little should make so great a difference?

Suppose there had been no possibility of any speech at all—which might very well have happened—what then? Is there no possibility of penitence after death?

That is one thing that troubles me, and the other is, how far my prayers are really any good now to this soul that is more dear than ever before to me. I think there is really nothing I would not do to help, and yet it sometimes seems as if there were nothing that I *can* do to lessen whatever punishment my dear one may be suffering.

I feel I ought not to trouble you with so long a letter from one unknown to you, but your sermon made me feel that you could help me to understand—if you can spare the

time. If not, please do not trouble to answer this, and forgive the liberty I have taken.

Yours truly,
M. GREEN.

LETTER 6.—*From Dr Gray
to Miss M. Green*

DEAR MADAM,

I sympathise with you very deeply in your sorrow, not only of bereavement but of spiritual distress. You will always be thankful for those few broken words of penitence, and that you were there to offer the prayers asked for.

To my mind this makes all the difference between hope and despair. Perhaps I have no right to use that word, for we ought not to despair of anyone. But as far as we can see, to die in sin, unconfessed, unrepented of, must shut a soul out of Paradise. Yet even so they are not beyond the reach of God's love. Have you ever pondered the meaning of those words in the Creed:

“He descended into hell?” After His death our blessed Lord in His human soul passed into the unseen world, not only to welcome the soul of the penitent thief into Paradise, but also to care for the souls of the impenitent. St Peter tells us explicitly (1 Pet. iii. 18-20) that “He died the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh but quickened in the spirit; in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison.” St Peter goes on to explain that He preached the good news—that is the force of the Greek word—to the men and women who were drowned in the Flood because they would not listen to Noah’s warnings.

The fate of these sinners, cut off so tragically, was often debated in Jewish schools. They were regarded as typical of the whole class of unrepentant sinners. What hope could there be for them? The answer is precise in the following chapter (1 Pet. iv. 6): “For unto this end was the Gospel preached even unto the dead, that they might be judged according to men in

the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." So the method of God is the same in the unseen world. He will never force the will of man. But He will grant another opportunity of turning, even in such a case as theirs.

It does not follow that every sinner in every age, however many their opportunities as Christians, if they neglect so great salvation, must have another opportunity. Read Heb. vi. 4-6: "For as touching those who were once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again into repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." But we may dare to hope that in many cases which we should judge severely, He who searches the hearts and knows what amount of resistance has been made to temptation, and above all the amount of ignorance which has not been blame-worthy in the life, will bring

their erring souls into the light. For them, too, the prayer will avail: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Now in your dear one's case there was definite acknowledgment of guilt, and a pitiful appeal for prayer which gives us a strong reason for hope that such repentance may be accepted. Of course, it is very inchoate, incomplete, needing to be deepened in that strange experience of the spiritual world, when all the things of earth fall away. We shall feel ashamed as never before, our own hearts accusing us, as we see in the light of Christ's presence what we might have been in Him. We know little enough about the resting-places of our Father's House, but the very word which He has put on our lips suggests to us definite possibilities of quiet thought, and the cleansing sorrow of true contrition.

By all means pray as the early Christians did for their dear ones, that they might have rest and peace, and that eternal light might shine upon them. As you say,

you cannot do anything to lessen the punishment of that terrible self-accusing of an awakened conscience. As Dr Moberly puts it, "God's punishments are self-acting." When our wills accept them as deserved they are remedial. You will not pray that your dear one may be spared one pang, only that "godly sorrow may work repentance not to be repented of." And all that you know in the mystery of your own heart's acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as your Redeemer can speed your prayer to the Throne of Grace that mind may still touch mind as your prayer soothed the dying hour. Don't allow yourself to get morbid about it, but from time to time, I would suggest on a Friday, take such thoughts as those suggested in the hymn "Rock of Ages" and pray that their strength and comfort may be, as it were, passed on.

" Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

Is it not a comfort to lay down our burden
of sin and sorrow ?

You know this I am sure, but you will like me to remind you of it, and you will some day be grateful to me for adding—when you have finished your prayer don't brood over it, turn away resolutely to other thoughts. You have passed through a very severe trial of your faith, and you need a kind of spiritual tonic, lest your capacity to serve should suffer through your depression. The antidote is praise.

Meditate on the praises of the Redeemed in St John's "Book of the Revelation," or, as Christmas is at hand, on the Hymn of the Angels and its expansion in the "Gloria in Excelsis," or the "Magnificat," or a hymn like "Praise to the Holiest in the height." I can promise you not only a happy Christmas but renewed vigour in service which, thank God, you have been able to render to that poor soul.

And I will promise, also, through Advent and Christmas-tide, to keep you both on my Intercession list.

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 7.—*From an old friend and
parishioner*

DEAR GRAY,

That was a fine sermon you gave us on Sunday, only you did not carry it quite far enough—to my thinking. I was listening for some illuminating words on the difficult question of death-bed repentance, but I imagine even you cannot tackle the whole problem of death and the hereafter, in a single sermon!

As a matter of fact, no one has ever supplied me with what I consider an intelligent explanation of the effect of penitence in relation to death, so I have formed a theory of my own, and should be interested to know if you would “pass” it.

I suppose the value of penitence—apart from amendment, which is not possible on a death-bed—lies in the definite ranging of

heart and will on the side of God, in antagonism to the sin or sins committed. I imagine that one enters upon life after death at enmity either with God or with the sins which keep us apart from Him, and that consequently our eternal happiness or misery depends upon the attitude of mind in which we leave this world—in regard to sin, I mean.

That seems to me intelligible enough, only at this rate, where does "saving grace" come in? and why should the moment of death, more than any other, fix our eternal destinies? It is all very puzzling, but then I suppose you would say the whole problem of sin is! Certainly I find it so.

I wish I could ask you to come round for a pipe and a leisurely talk, such as we have not had since the war began, and to see my chrysanthemums, which are really looking well just now, in spite of the scant attention they get nowadays. But I have to be off again to-morrow about this Government job, leaving poor old Fred to keep the works going as best he can.

How I wish I were young enough to go

out and fight, instead of wearing out one's heart as well as one's shoe-leather over these rather dreary jobs at home!

Yours always sincerely,

CH. SKELTON.

The enclosed address will find me during the next fortnight, if the spirit should move you to write.

C. S.

LETTER 8.—*From Dr Gray
to Mr Ch. Skelton*

DEAR SKELTON,

I wish with you that we could have a quiet chat, so much more satisfactory than a letter on so difficult a subject. But in war-time we must sacrifice many pleasures, as you have done so readily for the country.

You have explained the value of penitence excellently as the definite ranging of heart and will on the side of God. But I think we must add, "with purpose of amendment."

That is all that can be done on a death-bed, but then you can have no true contrition without it. I take it we shall be judged by the trend of the character, towards God or away from Him. In the Parable of the Judgment of the Nations (Matt. xxv.) there are only two classes spoken of by our Lord, and we are sometimes tempted to question why? We are conscious that our motives are often so mixed and our consciences so far from clear that it seems impossible to pass a verdict of "not guilty" in our own case. We do not deserve to stand on His right Hand, we dread to pass to the left. But the Lord does not mince matters. He does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. The only thing He bars is the lie in the soul, the hidden disloyalty which has played false to Him. That He abhors, and the self-accused must be self-accurst.

What possibility of making a better response to His love may be offered in the prison-house of souls, in which are gathered, as St Peter teaches (1 Peter iii. 18), un-

repentant sinners such as those who were drowned in the Flood, we dare not presume to assert. We may dare to hope that the Lord's offer of salvation to them may be repeated to other souls. But we are concerned, for the moment, only with the attitude in regard to sin in which we leave this world. That is how you put it, and I would only add again the word "habitual." We must have our faces to the light or to the darkness, and there is no injustice in the punishing of the guilty.

You ask where does "saving grace" come in? Surely in any opportunity which the lost soul has ever had presented in this life. We shall be judged according to that which we have, not according to that which we have not.

That is the point in the parable of the Judgment of the Nations (Matt. xxv.) to whom Christ has not been preached. They are judged only by the law written in their hearts, the law of natural religion, of natural affection, the feeding of the hungry, the

relief of the thirsty, kindness to prisoners. Nothing is said about faith and the obligations of a Christian. Surely in the case of the baptized there must be a higher standard, and from the moment of Baptism through all the experiences of the Christian life, grace offered in the Sacraments, in any call to prayer, in any sermon that touched the heart, grace going before and following, *saving* if the heart was open to receive it. Have you realised that salvation is spoken of in three senses in the New Testament, past, present, and future? They are often confused.

When we speak of salvation in the past Redemption is the point in view. "By grace ye are saved" means, ye are brought into a state of salvation in the ark of Christ's Church. But as Hooker puts it "the Sacraments are not mechanical but moral means of grace." The grace—"God's free help," is perhaps the best because the simplest explanation—may be present and profitless through our lack of the faith and repentance which alone bring the will to

accept it. So we come to salvation in the present in which the continuous work of grace is the point in view. "The Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved." But the danger is not yet past. As Keble puts it :

"The grey-haired saint may fail at last
The surest guide a wanderer prove,
Death only binds us fast
To the bright shore of love."

"He that shall endure to the end the same shall be saved." Then glory is the point in view, when the time of probation is ended.

The only sense in which I think that the moment of death fixes our eternal destiny is this, that it marks the end of temptation for all who are "more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

But as you say the whole problem of sin is very puzzling.

What is sin? In St John's words "Sin is lawlessness." It is wilful doing, or saying, or thinking, what is known to be bad. Sin is not in the body, though the body is the sphere of strong temptations to injure it.

It is not in the mind, for ignorance is not sin, unless we are ignorant through wilful shutting of our eyes to the light of God's truth. Sin is in the will, and to deny free-will is to ignore the universal consciousness of shame.

Why should I blame myself for losing my temper? I was provoked, taken unawares, physically tired. Yes, all these excuses are worth something, but they will not alter the fact that I might have held myself in check better and I know it, and my fall to-day makes it harder for me to-morrow. If repeated acts make a habit my free-will is held in chains and I cannot snap them. But anyone can look back to certain crises of his life when he had the power of choice and chose wrong. Is it not so? How strongly the shame and glory of our life are interwoven. It is God's will to create us with this capacity of self-determination, slowly evolved in the long history of the race, which makes us in the end worth having in His service as servants not slaves, not mere machines, but willing and obedient.

The tragedy of human life throughout its long history has been just this, as now seen in the wreck of our civilisation to-day, that the stored-up experience of generations cannot ensure progress, that the will to power, as the phrase goes, may lead to fatal determination of nations as well as individuals.

But I don't want to get off the track of your main question, the problem of sin. It is a mystery which I can not explain, but we are surrounded by mysteries, and all I ask for is a working theory by which to live. The deeper mystery for me is, how can sin be forgiven? We need some theory of the Atonement, but the simpler the better. St Paul seems to prefer to state it as a fact, greater than all our theories, when he writes of our Lord Jesus Christ "whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith by His blood" (Rom. iii. 25). There is no fiction here, no injustice. He was a willing sufferer, and the value of the sacrifice was not the shedding of blood but the will by which He chose to die. The fact remains

that by the Cross of Christ the most hardened sinner finds it possible to lay down his burden of sin, for the love of Christ holds him fast, and the true Spirit of Christ leads him forth to a new life of freedom and service.

You and I with our sheltered lives, preserved from so many forms of temptation which overcome others, feel that all our hopes are centred in the Cross of Christ and that in proportion to our opportunities we are not really better than the worst sinners.

“ For merit lives from man to man,
And not from man, O Lord, to Thee.”

Surely we can trust the Judge of all the earth to do right in each case.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 9.—*From Mr Skelton*

MY DEAR GRAY,

It is most kind of you to have spared so much time to answering my letter, and I am sincerely grateful.

You have cleared up many of the points which have perplexed me, and you have also, incidentally, raised one or two others. It seems too bad to trouble you with another long screed, and yet I feel that I owe it to you to try and tell you just where it is that I find myself failing to appropriate the thoughts you offer. For I believe that my difficulties in this respect are not peculiar to myself, but that they represent a certain attitude of mind characteristic of the "average layman" if there is such a being!

I can write about it better, I think, than I could talk, and I have a singularly good opportunity on a wet Sunday afternoon in the empty smoking-room of quite the dreariest hotel I have ever struck yet, which is saying much.

When I try to analyse the impression which your letter makes upon me, I am conscious of two conflicting attitudes of mind. Every word you have written about the personal aspect of penitence, and its relation to death and the hereafter, in terms of one's own experience, interests me intensely,

and I find myself reading these parts of your letter again and again, with a genuine and keen desire of assimilating them.

But when you go on to speak of "Salvation," "Redemption"—just as when I have heard you preach about "Justification"—my mind seems to shy off immediately, and shirk the effort to grasp your meaning.

It is not—as I think you know—that I for a moment deny the foundation truths of our Faith, but that the theological sounding words have a curiously chilling effect upon my mind. And when I try to discover why this should be so, I seem to find a certain lack of correlation between these terms and my own experience. What do they actually mean to me, and to the majority of lay-folk? Are we genuinely anxious about our ultimate salvation, have we even any very clear ideas as to what it means to be "saved," or what we are saved from? I question it. When I challenge my own experience, I am conscious of a very real desire to be freed from the sins which hamper and weaken me, but that is because they

spoil my life and lessen my power *now*, and not with any thought of the hereafter.

I can also truly say that I long to know and love our dear Lord better, and that I grieve over my failures towards Him, but how far I am being "saved" by Him I do not seem to know or ask—as far, that is, as concerns my future state. I want with all my heart to be saved from the miserable power of sin *now*, so that my life, here and now, may be something better worth while; but the thought of salvation "from the wrath to come," leaves me cold.

This reads egotistically, but I want to get at something, and that is, the explanation of this very common attitude of mind; for I know my experience here to be identical with that of thousands of other ordinary Christians, and I believe that it has a good deal to say to the so-called "religious indifference" of the present day. I don't believe, myself, that we are any more indifferent than our forefathers were to the "things that belong unto our peace," only

we demand that they shall be set before us in terms of present experience. And there is no blinking the fact that the theological terms which you clergy are trained and accustomed to use—Salvation, Redemption, Atonement, Justification—do not convey to most of us lay-folk any very definite or personal meaning

Yet it is quite clear that the realities they stand for must matter as much to us as they do to you.

You will say that I am labouring a very obvious point, but beneath it all there is this thought troubling my individual conscience. Why is it that when you write about the psychology of penitence I am keenly interested, and when you go on to its theology I am tempted to "skip"? Does it mean that my religion is too self-centred, or that my mind is lazy, or that some new forms of expression are needed for the old truths of theology?

I feel compunctions at firing off this fresh set of questions, and it would be easier,

believe me, to leave them unasked. But we are all up against the realities of life and death to-day, and our Faith is being challenged by stern standards. You "ministers and stewards of God's mysteries," as you are called in to-day's Collect, have a hard part to play in presenting these mysteries in such forms as will answer to the demands of this day of destruction and reconstruction, and it seems to me that we of the laity can help you better by telling you just when and how we fail to grasp your teaching, than by silently rejecting those parts which make no appeal to us.

That is my reason for writing, added to the fact that you and I are old friends besides being Vicar and parishioner. I much fear I shall not get back for Xmas after all: it is a great disappointment. My thoughts will be with you all, and you, I know, will spare a thought and a prayer for

Your sincere friend,

CH. SKELTON.

LETTER 10.—*From Dr Gray
to Mr Ch. Skelton*

MY DEAR SKELTON,

I am very grateful for your letter, for you have crystallised some thoughts which have been vaguely floating in my mind since a conversation with a layman some weeks ago. He complained that sermons don't interest him, yet he is what one would call a religious man. If only I could have your wet afternoon, away from interruptions, to make my reply I should be thankful, but I must do my best.

What is the difference between the mind of an English Churchman and a Scotch Presbyterian? I am quite sure any reader of "The Bonnie Brier Bush" must agree with me that the latter would have some definite idea as to the meaning of the terms "Salvation," "Redemption," "Atonement." Is it because he has been trained to use theological terms, or because his mind is naturally more alert in abstract thinking? You have often heard me complain of the

Englishman's laziness about hard thinking. I don't include you in that class, and I don't want to be unjust to anyone who naturally prefers as food for his mind something concrete that he can grip easily.

Yet the fact remains that when we get down to the root of things we are bound to come to mysteries which can only be expressed in terms more or less metaphysical. And that is where my friend breaks off and declines to go further.

After all, I am myself somewhat digressing from the line of thought which you set me, but your words about "the psychology of penitence" set me off. We are continually being told that we must turn our theology from use of metaphysical to use of psychological terms. We need both, and St Augustine has taught us to use both.

But I admit frankly we have not been very successful in explaining ourselves either on the doctrine of Divine Personality or on the Doctrine of the Atonement.

I cannot believe that there would be much difficulty about the use of the abstract

words Salvation and Redemption, if the ideas underlying them had been properly explained.

When you say you want to be saved from the power of sin *now*, you come to the kernel of the question. No one who desires that sincerely can be eternally lost. But when you say that "the thought of Salvation 'from the wrath to come' leaves you cold," are you not unconsciously influenced by the widespread idea that it is somewhat selfish to desire to be saved eternally if others are not? Surely all spiritual blessings are conferred on us, not as marks of Divine favour which we know to be undeserved, but as starting points from which we can begin to work for others and bring them into the same happiness of pardon and peace.

Only think of the abyss of moral deterioration into which you might fall if you turned your back on the Redeemer; the cold calculating selfishness which your heart might make its idol, which some hearts as you know do set up as their aim, making all

around them miserable. What will they do in the end thereof? Is our righteous human indignation at the way in which they turn what might be an earthly Paradise of a home into a howling wilderness, no indication of a wrath to come which could righteously condemn them to the outer darkness of self-tormenting remorse? It is what they deserve. Then it is what we who have been rescued must long to free them from, and this desire is again a faint reflection of the light of Divine Love. Selfishness is excluded from our outlook. We will, or God wills, that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Again, when you bring in the term "Justification" as one to be avoided I think it is not merely because it is an abstract term, but because you know something of the arid controversies which have raged round it, and you want to escape to a clearer atmosphere of thought. Let us take it away, so to speak, from the law-court to the home. Let us consider the case of a naughty

child. So long as he is defiant a wise parent will withhold forgiveness. But the moment that his pride breaks down, that he is ready to obey and feel sorry, his father can meet him more than half-way, and help him to put himself right with the law he has broken, either in the home or out of it, making a fresh start and therefore to be trusted again.

So St Paul teaches us in *Romans* that God accounts us righteous from the moment that the love of Christ wins the battle in our conscience and we turn to Him, sorry for the past. As St Augustine puts it: "He regards not what we are but what we are about to be," by His Grace. Our common sense approves this as the height of Divine wisdom.

But I must stop here. I don't think that your religion is too self-centred, or that we need a New Theology. But we do need to explain the old shibboleths, and to give the larger thoughts of a new age room to expand.

I shall not cease to pray for you with

much thankfulness for the benefit which it is to me to exchange confidences on these great themes.

I always find you stimulating.

Your sincere friend,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 11.—*From a young man in great misery over the consequences of his own wrongdoing*

DEAR DR GRAY,

You were good enough to ask me to write to you after a bit, to tell you how I get on. Well, I suppose I can say all right. The work is hard, of course, and I have the dullest part of it to do, but at any rate it tires one out and leaves less time to think. But there's all too much of that anyhow, and do what I will I cannot get rid of that awful misery of remorse.

Indeed I do try to think of all you said to me, and to remember and believe that God has forgiven me for that madness (for indeed the more I think of it the more I think I must have been mad) for which I am, as you know, so truly sorry, and have been so horribly punished. But I can't get away from the thought of all I've lost; first my

home and all my prospects, and now my darling wife. And to think that it's *I* who have really caused her death, by breaking her heart for her! That's the awful part, for it makes me wonder, sometimes, whether *she* can ever forgive me. And I expect it's a wrong thing to say, but her forgiveness seems to matter to me more than God's. Besides, *He* understands, and how can I ever be certain that *she* does, in whatever place or state she is now? And, even if she does, it can't undo the wrong I have done her, and I sometimes feel as if that were a barrier between us which no power—not even God's—could sweep away.

So I am very, very wretched, and I cannot truly say I have found much comfort yet in the thought of God's pardon. If Edith could come back for just one moment, and tell me she has forgiven me and loves me still, I think I could be at peace. Without that it seems to me that forgiveness is rather an empty word.

But I don't want to trouble and grieve you when you have been so good to me. I

am really quite well again now, and it does seem so hard that I can't get accepted for active service, when I should not mind getting killed, and so many men have to sacrifice themselves who don't want to.

Again thanking you for all your great kindness,

Yours gratefully,

X. Y.¹

LETTER 12.—*From Dr Gray, in answer to the foregoing*

DEAR X,

I have been looking for a letter from you, and am not surprised to hear that you have been passing through a bad time. I pray for you regularly, but I cannot expect that you will escape from the agonising sorrow which is part of the punishment of your sin. Do not doubt for one moment that God has forgiven you. You have confessed it to Him, and have received absolution for it in His Name from His minister of recon-

¹ The signature to this letter is withheld.

ciliation. Yours is what St Paul calls the "godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." But you must at all costs resist the temptation, which will surely come in moments when God seems far away, to lapse into the "sorrow of the world which worketh death." You know the symptoms; a dull despairing mood, in which you think life cannot be worth living any more, because you have made such a mess of it. Of course if left to yourself life would not be worth living. But with God? His promise holds good: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Think of the difference between Simon Peter and Judas. Of the one we read: "He went out and wept bitterly;" of the other: "He went and hanged himself." Peter's humiliation was not ended when the Lord appeared to him on Easter Day to assure him of forgiveness. His sin had been public, like yours, and his restoration was public when the question "Lovest thou Me?" was put to him again and again,

together with the commission to work for Christ. Nobly he responded and became, as his first Epistle shows, the Apostle of hope. Read it again from this point of view.

Now contrast the case of Judas. He had lost faith and hope in the cause of Christ. He had yielded to the temptation of dishonesty. Then he lost his love. That was fatal. He betrayed his Master in spite of the loving appeal, silently made to him at the Last Supper, when he was paid the compliment of receiving from the Master of the Feast a sop dipped in the same. He repented when the deed was done, threw down the price of his shame before the Chief Priests, and committed suicide.

His repentance turned to wrath and despair. Why? Because he had lost love to Christ. If he had kept but a spark of love, would Christ have forsaken him? Surely not. Even he might have been restored. Cling to that thought. If you had to live for yourself things would seem black and desperate indeed. But with

Christ light can shine out of darkness, and as a true penitent you can yet do something for Him in the world.

Now I can turn to your question about your dear wife. She cannot fail to forgive you if she is with Christ, as we humbly hope, in Paradise. Forgiveness of others is the one condition which our Saviour makes in His Prayer when He bids us ask for forgiveness. We cannot doubt it for one moment, nor can we doubt that she understands. As Tennyson puts it :

“ All the blessed saints in Heaven
Are both forgiving and forgiven.”

If she had lived, the wrong that you had done to her might have been a barrier between you, possibly a lifelong barrier, but not in the atmosphere of the heavenly life, not in the unveiled Presence of the Saviour. It is unthinkable.

It is, of course, easier for me to write this than for you to believe it. But I am quite

sure of my ground, and I most sincerely and confidently hope that you will come to believe it. The one thing needful is that you should practise the Presence of God daily, and pray that He may by His Holy Spirit make known to her your penitence and your undying love, your sorrow that she cannot come back to reassure you, your confidence—I cannot put any weaker word down—that she has forgiven.

The old saying, “to know all is to pardon all,” is true of every case where penitence has made any offender against love forgivable.

Don't worry about being rejected for active service. It is far harder for you to live for your country and make munitions than to go out and take the risk of death. The quality of your self-sacrifice is quite as fine, if the conditions under which it is rendered make a greater demand on your moral character. I feel sure that you will come out of the ordeal as gold tried in the furnace. God has other work for you to do

in the world, and then—the end of all self-tormenting questions, and reunion in the light of His life and love.

Yours most sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

SERIES III
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

LETTER 13.—*From Mrs James,
a young widow*

DEAR DR GRAY,

Thank you so very much for your most kind letter. It was just like you to find time to write in the midst of all your heavy Christmas work, and it was such a comfort to me, and a help in going through with this first sad Christmas without my dear one. It is all so hard to realise in any way. Sometimes it seems only yesterday since he was home on leave for last Christmas Day; and then sometimes it seems centuries since that awful day in May when the telegram came to say he was killed.

I often think that if only I could have been with him—if I could have seen him die—I could grasp the idea better. He was always so splendidly strong and well and vigorous that I can't bring my mind to picture him helpless—far less dead. And that

brings me to a point I should dearly like to ask you about—if indeed you have time for a second letter.

I suppose, I believe—at any rate, I know I ought to—that he is not really dead; I mean, that his spirit lives on, in some state unimaginable to me, and that all that wonderful vigour and strength of his still goes on and does things—somehow and somewhere. But it all seems so remote from me, and from the life we made together during those four gloriously happy years.

He always took such care of me, and of our baby when she came. The very last time he was home on leave, he was making plans for me and her, and talking over our future. So that I feel that if he lives on, in any state that is still himself, he must want to take care of us still, and to use his strength for that purpose.

And yet, if he is taking care of us, why am I not allowed to *feel* that he is? It would make life so different if I could know that he is near, and that he is caring for baby and me.

Every time I go to the Holy Communion I say to myself that I know he is there too, but it doesn't seem to give me much comfort, somehow, for if he is there it seems so hard that he cannot make his presence known to me, by ever such a tiny sign.

Sometimes when I say in the Creed that I believe in the Communion of Saints, I can't help feeling that it does not help me much, where my dear Rupert is concerned. I never thought much about that part of the Creed before—I suppose because it never mattered to me very much—but now it seems rather a mockery to go on saying it unless it has some practical meaning for Rupert and me. Is he a “saint” now? Splendid and dear as he was, it is a little difficult to think of him as such. He was never very great at Church-going, though he never absolutely gave it up, and he would always come with me to the Holy Communion at Christmas and Easter. But I can't seem to find him there now, although indeed I try and try to, with all my heart and soul!

Do forgive this incoherent letter, dear

Dr Gray, and please don't feel bound to answer it.

All good wishes for the New Year, and my love to Mrs Gray. Please tell her I do so hope some day to bring my baby girl for her to see. How I wish I were still living near enough to run in and out of the Vicarage as I used to do !

Yours affectionately,

EVELYN JAMES.

LETTER 14.—*From Dr Gray to Mrs James*

DEAR EVELYN,

Many thanks for your letter. I remembered you at our early Eucharist on Christmas Day as I promised, and I am so glad to know that you are trying to bear your cross nobly.

Of course you cannot realise your loss yet. It is anniversaries like this which must bring it home to you. But let me warn you not to try to picture him helpless and dead. Think of him living with all his glorious capacity of vigour and strength to be brought

to perfection on the Day of Resurrection. I think you have reached the kernel of truth when you pass from the remembrance of his vigour to the thought of his care of you. We know so little about the condition of the faithful departed in the Intermediate State, as St Paul describes it, "out of the body." You will remember how he longs to be "clothed upon," that mortality may be swallowed up of life? He seems to hint at some sort of clothing, so to speak, of the spirit even in Paradise, before the perfected glorious body of the Resurrection is attained. But we may be quite content, surely, to leave this uncertain if we can picture your dear one as exercising all the functions of the spirit, and above all praying for you and your little one, thus caring for you in the best way.

He is still himself, and in the Holy Communion you do draw near to him. As some one has said very beautifully: "Jesus is the trysting place of all His saints." But it is part of the hard discipline which the Lord in His very love calls you to endure that you

should not have the sign you very naturally crave for. We must "walk by faith, not by sight." I want you to pray for grace to believe that, for just in proportion as you learn that lesson you will be able to teach your child to believe in things unseen.

Your questioning about the Communion of Saints is very natural. I am afraid that we have let the interpretation of the words go too much by default.

Think of it as meaning "the friendship of all good men." Your gallant Rupert was not a conventional saint, an ecclesiastically-minded layman, and you would be the last to think of him as without faults. Your very words imply that he was a bit slack about his duties as a Churchman.

But I am as confident as you are that he was a simple-hearted Christian gentleman, and perhaps it was the fault of the Church that he did not care for Church-going more, in that he had never realised that he had a share in the Great Offering of our Eucharist, which it was his duty to take up in worship.

I never knew a man more keen to do what he could see was his duty.

I remember that he once consulted me about a friend who was getting into debt and whether he could wisely interfere. I felt then what a keen sense of honour he had, and I shall never forget the chivalrous way in which he always stood up for the weak. I have heard that of him from his school days. So I say again—we might have helped him to be a better Churchman, but I am certain that he did not cease to be a saint in the true sense of the word, “one called upon to be holy” as a “member of Christ,” in whom the indwelling Spirit did dwell and teach, in all his loving care for you, and his fine instinct of sympathy for the oppressed and down-trodden. It flashed up in him when he came to say good-bye to me, and told me what he had seen in Belgium, and how he yearned to win freedom for those homeless refugees who came into the British lines with their terrible story of maltreatment.

Before you go to Holy Communion next

Sunday, read over the chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews which describes Christian worship as a "coming into Mount Zion . . . to the general assembly and church of the free-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. xii. 22-24).

I am sure you will come to see a new meaning in it all, and you will feel that he can come to see it too, through the same Lord in whom you are still united, and to live evermore. So may the New Year bring you the "peace which passes understanding" to keep your heart, and help you to pick up the threads of life again, and live for your little one.

Mrs Gray sends her love and will be glad to see you as soon as you can come. Though you have left the parish I must still call myself,

Your affectionate Vicar,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 15.—*From Captain Edward Gray,
a cousin*

DEAR JACK,

Thanks many for your letter. It's most noble of you and Mary to offer to burden yourselves with such a crock as I am still, but as soon as I can get away from the Hospital I must make a push to get to the dear old Mater. They won't let me leave here till my leg is sound, and by that time I shall be fit for the longer journey. Meanwhile I am all right in other respects, and read a lot, and think a bit—largely about the old days, and old ambitions, and many of our talks and plans for our respective futures. We hit off yours pretty accurately, but we never dreamt of my turning into a man of war, and it has certainly been very remote from my inclinations. Not that I regret it altogether; certainly one gains experience and food for thought;

and here I am minded to see if you can help me.

We used to correspond about theological matters—do you remember?—in the 'Varsity days, when I had not yet made up my mind whether to turn priest or barrister, and it would seem like old times to get a letter from you upon a point of doctrine, which is what I want. I know you can't really spare time to write it, but I claim the privilege of the wounded defender of his country, and your confirmation classes and ruri-decanal meetings must go to the wall for once !

My point is this. One is continually face to face with the problems of death, out there, and of men's attitude with regard to it—including one's own—and I have been trying to analyse that attitude, and to arrive at some idea as to how far it is actually influenced by the Christian doctrines which some, at any rate, among us profess to hold. So far as I can see, the said doctrines have a mighty small effect upon the average man's thoughts or fears or hopes about death, because

they are so vaguely taught and loosely held.

Take my own case, *e.g.*, and I suppose I may without conceit class myself a few points above the average on this subject, because I have, as you know, made sundry conscientious efforts to understand the beliefs I profess. Yet, as I look back upon all the hundreds of times I have been face to face with death during the past few months, I cannot precisely say where my professed belief in the "resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come" comes in. I ask myself what this belief means, in terms of this present hell out in Flanders, and so far I have arrived at no convincing answer.

Or, to go a step further still, and take what I assume you would count the centre and point of our whole Faith—the doctrine of our Lord's own Resurrection—I find it extraordinarily hard to say what actual difference this makes to one in face of death.

I, personally, accept that doctrine. I sincerely count myself among those who believe it, and yet I cannot say that my life

hinges upon it in any way, or that it enables me to meet death more gallantly, or more calmly, than many men who reject the doctrine altogether.

What is the meaning of it all ? If you can make it clear to my rather addled brain, you will save a sick man many feverish hours. For I can't help thinking while I am lying here, and my thoughts are not always cheering ones. It is not cheering, *e.g.*, to wonder whether, after all, one's faith is vain, and whether one has or has not, any genuine belief in the doctrines one recites so glibly in our Creeds.

"I believe in the resurrection of the dead"—Do I ? "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." Honestly, I am not conscious of looking for either ; I feel far more impressed, just now, with the utter finality of death.

Perhaps my faith has grown rather frail through lack of fostering, and neglect of church-going, etc. Yet my religion is something I prize, and I do say my prayers. So there it is ! and if you feel disposed to preach

me a sermon on my shortcomings, you are welcome to do so.

But what I want of you is something definite, ideas that I can get hold of and translate into every-day practice. I want to find out what the doctrine of resurrection—Christ's and our own—*means*, to me and to other commonplace fellows fighting and dying for their country.

Meanwhile Nurse says I mustn't write any more, so good-bye, old man. So glad to hear you are all going strong. My love to Mary, and my thanks for her kind thought.

Write soon, and write long! it's dreary here.

Your affectionate cousin,

E. F. GRAY.

LETTER 16.—*From Dr Gray
to Capt. Edward Gray*

MY DEAR TED,

It was good to get so cheery a letter from you again, and to hear that your wound is healing satisfactorily. We should have

been glad to nurse you here, but we quite understand that you wish to get home as quickly as you can.

And it was like the old days to find you firing off theological problems. At least that was my first impression, but as I read on I felt that your questions did not play round the surface of things, as I often retorted then, but went right down to the roots of our personal religion, by which I mean our personal relation to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank God, I said to myself, it is the same Ted, but changed, deepened, and much nearer to the central vision of truth than when he could only see it afar off.

Your difficulty is more imaginary than real. You write as if Christianity were merely a system of teaching, a compact set of doctrines, current coin in our comfortable life in England, but needing to be exchanged for other foreign coins in Flanders, or as you somewhat luridly phrase it, "translated into terms of this present hell." It is a terrible experience to have come through the murky

atmosphere of that valley of the shadow of death, and I am not surprised (to keep up the metaphor) that your eyes feel strained and you cannot see things quite clearly.

Christianity is Christ, not a mere set of formulas about Him. Or as Bishop Lightfoot puts it :

“The substance of the Gospel is neither a dogmatic system nor an ethical code, but a Person, and a Life.” You remember Tennyson’s lines :

“And so the Word had breath and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought.”

Well then, if a man has accepted the service of Christ, and prays for help and guidance, he may have a very imperfect knowledge of the Christian doctrine of the “resurrection of the dead,” but he has the root of the matter in him, because he believes at least that through the gate of death he will go to Christ, and that somehow those dear ones whom he has left behind will be brought to him again.

I remember reading about a young officer who fell in the Boer War. While he lay on the ground mortally wounded, he heard his men lamenting him, and he said to them: "If I am anything like what you think, let me tell you the secret. Before I left home my old father gave me a motto from the Bible: 'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.'" And the last words they heard were "To see the King!"

Of course we want to teach men what reflection, guided as we believe by the Holy Spirit, has taught the Apostles about the Intermediate State, and the Future Life in the Resurrection Body. But we must do it on the understanding that all our words are inadequate to express the glories of the unseen world. We have no celestial language. And the way in which Heaven is described in popular hymns seems unreal to men because they have not been taught to think of "golden gates" and "palms" and "crowns" as symbolical.

Your next question about the Lord's Resurrection is much more difficult to answer, because here we come to a fundamental difference between a real Christian and an unbeliever.

I acknowledge with you the gallantry of many who reject the doctrine. But the contrast is not between the gallantry of believers and unbelievers, but between their secret or acknowledged hope or despair. I am confident that your hope would give you an added confidence and calmness.

You can afford in any moment of leisure to stop and think, they cannot. Duty impels them to run all risks, but if this life is all, they die to secure liberty for others with splendid forgetfulness of self, as they will not live to see the new Europe that we dream of, after the war.

But you, if the call came to die, would be able to hope that in the unseen world you would know something of what is going on, and would, with them, reap the fruits of the spiritual harvest of lives won through the very losing.

So our Lord spoke of His Death : “ Except a seed fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.” And the Apostles who saw Him after His Resurrection were taught that He is the first-fruits of them that rise, not in the natural body doomed to corruption, but in the spiritual body to be fashioned like unto His glorious Body.

Read St Paul’s chapter, 1 Cor. xv., and ask yourself whether it does not bring a thrill of joy like the joy of the first Easter Day, which is simply overwhelming. You will want to bear your witness to others, not because you think they can be braver for it, but happier.

That chapter is the pivot upon which my faith hinges, because it is the earliest written testimony, earlier than the Gospels, written within twenty-five years of the event. The details in the Gospels may be difficult to harmonise, but they bear unshaken testimony to the fact of His Resurrection, which was borne in upon St Paul’s mind by the Vision on the dusty road to Damascus.

The difficulties that some men feel about

the impossibility of the resuscitation of a corpse are serious, but we are not concerned with them at this point. We cannot hope to understand all mysteries and all knowledge. I think that this natural body may be transfigured into the glorious body. I do not ask how. Why should the Holy One see the corruption which is the natural end of my flesh?

I hope that this much will give you something to think over. I wish I had time to add to it. There is no danger that your faith will evaporate while you say your prayers and miss Church-going. So don't worry about it if you can't catch hold of my way of putting things at once. It will all come right. Mary sends her love with mine.

Your affectionate cousin,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 17.—*From Captain Gray*

DEAR OLD JACK,

It really is noble of you to have spared so much time to answering me, and I can assure you it has not been wasted. Your letter has "given me to think," with the result that here I am firing off another! It's rather hard luck upon you, but you must forgive me, old fellow, for I can't yet get hold of the clue I'm groping after. Your letter *nearly* gives it me, but not quite. I expect it was my fault, in not making clear what it is, exactly, that I'm after.

I think it is this. Taking it, as you say—and as I am willing to accept—that "Christianity is Christ," and that the "substance of the Gospel is . . . a Person and a Life"; and taking it that the fact of the Resurrection means that that Person is living now, and in living touch with us; what ought this to mean to *me*, in terms of my present life, whatever it may be, here and now? You spoke of doctrines not being coins to be changed into different currencies for different

conditions, but surely they are at least truths to be re-translated by each one into the language of his individual life? The doctrine of the Resurrection, *e.g.*, means something quite definite in *your* life, I make no doubt—the continual sense of Christ's Presence, perhaps; a conscious looking to Him for guidance in your work; a greater power and readiness in making your appeal to souls, and so forth. What does it mean in *mine*? I should be puzzled to tell you, and still more puzzled to know how to set about making it mean something definite. Indeed, that's what I want you to tell me how to do.

Your anecdote about the officer in the Boer War has chimed in curiously with an experience here. There has been, till to-day, a poor lad in the next bed to mine, horribly injured. The screens have been round his bed most of the time, but sometimes, when he has been moderately free from pain, I have watched his face. There has been such a marvellous serenity on it, and I have seen

him smile to himself, quite radiantly, and move his lips as though he were speaking to some one very dear. His expression has fascinated me, and the nurses say how wonderfully he bears it all, without a syllable of complaint, and with always a smile and a word of thanks for everything they do for him. They have taken him away to-day—to try some last expedient, they say, but, I believe, to let him die in peace—and I feel as though with him some spiritual presence had gone out of the ward.

Supposing that presence were the Presence of our Risen Lord, and that this boy had found the meaning of the Resurrection in terms, as I say, of his own life—why can't I find it too? For I can't—not so far, at least. When I set my mind to work at crystallising thoughts and formulating ideas, two sentences only echo in my brain—quite disconnectedly. One is Browning's line :

“ The very God ! think, Abib ! dost thou think ? ”

and the other is St Paul's determination to spend and sacrifice everything “ that

I may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection."

"The power of His Resurrection"—that's what I want to understand about, Jack. This boy who is dying to-day knows it—I'm sure of that. Do the men know it, out at the front, who speak of the "Great White Comrade" coming to them in their hours of pain? Why can't I find out the secret? or—if you will have it so—*how* can I? Answer which question you will.

"The very God! think, Abib! dost thou think?"

This poor Abib doesn't, and can't—that's the trouble! or rather, his thoughts bring him no further. Can you help me, I wonder?

Yours ever,

TED.

LETTER 18.—*From Dr Gray
to Captain E. F. Gray*

MY DEAR TED,

I was delighted to get another letter from you, and I think I can unravel your

tangle. Sorry as I am that you cannot yet find rest for your spirit, I am more than ever confident that you will soon find it.

Be encouraged, my dear fellow. It is like the last lap in a race. The real difficulty is simply this—that one cannot put everything one wants to say into a letter.

Granted that you are in living touch with our Risen Lord, you ask what ought this to mean to you. St Paul answers in the words of the Epistle for Easter Day (Coloss. iii. 1), "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above." All that you say about the sense of His Presence, and looking to Him for guidance in one's work, is exactly what I rejoice in day by day. And it comes from looking up, which is what I want you to do. Don't think that the new knowledge will come with a flash at once. Our Lord often heals men by degrees still, like the blind man who, at first, could only see men as trees walking, but presently saw them distinctly.

Take time to think of love and joy and peace in the life of Heaven, and then look

back over your life and see how in the best things—love of your home, and joy in our happy boyhood together, and peace in a good conscience, the light that shone was the light of Christ. And you know that the vision has never faded, because you were never disobedient to it. Only cares and troubles and the horrors of war have rolled like mists across the landscape, and sometimes blotted out the light.

Be patient a little longer, and you will see with your own eyes. I can't lend you mine. All the purpose of your life will show up, the road you came by through disappointments and failures, which often teach us more than success, even the trial of your wound. Do you remember the hymn we used to sing on Sunday mornings at our Preparatory School :—

“ Old friends, old scenes will lovelier be
As more of heaven in each we see ! ”

Your account of the poor lad in the next bed was very moving. Is it not true that “ one is taken and the other left ? ” He has

passed over, and all the trumpets will sound for him, as Bunyan in his Dream heard them sound for Christian. But you and I have life before us yet, and I want you to live it by that same power of the Resurrection, which will be given you day by day if you look up for it. It is our secret, hidden from the worldly eyes. Your old joy in your work will come back to you, and you will be able to take up your old interests again, but always with a feeling that this life is only a passing show, a sort of preparatory school for the larger life beyond when "our" eternal "life is hid with Christ in God."

I think, Ted, that you will want to witness for Christ more often. I know you have stood up for Him valiantly enough when your conscience demanded it. But I am sure that you made a mistake when you went only three times a year to your Communion because you were afraid of not living up to it. The weekly festival of the Resurrection brings new power to each weekly Communicant. Try it and see if it

does not come to you from Him Who knows us better than we know ourselves, and feeds our souls with the Bread of Heaven.

You say your thoughts bring you no further. I reply that they have brought you much further up the Mount of Vision than you think. But you must go on. I follow you with my prayers.

Yours affectionately,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 19.—*From Miss Winifred Barnes,
a High School Teacher*

DEAR DR GRAY,

I wonder if you remember the existence of one Winifred Barnes, whom you prepared for Confirmation ten years ago? I spent a whole winter with my aunt, Mrs Halford, and attended your Confirmation classes, and also a course of instructions on the Creed which you gave at my aunt's house.

I have my notes of those instructions still, and they have been the greatest help to me. Only unfortunately I was too young to take them down very intelligently, and so I continually find them fail me at the most important points. This is especially the case with that—to me—difficult doctrine of the Communion of Saints, and as I am trying to do some teaching on the Creed myself, in a very humble way—I thought I

would venture to write and ask your help on one or two points.

I can hardly expect that you can spare time to write to me about them, but if you should happen to have any written or printed notes of those instructions that you could lend me, I should be so grateful, and I would not keep them long.

I often wish I had been older when I heard those instructions, for you dwelt so much on the practical meaning of the various doctrines, and that is exactly where I find myself at a loss. I cannot arrive at any definite idea as to what I mean when I say that I believe in the Communion of Saints. Of course, I do believe that all those whom one calls "the saints"—by which I suppose we mean those Christians in all ages who have lived holy lives and died in the Faith of Christ—are united together in the life after death.

But I hardly see how this belief affects my own life very much. I am not a saint, and the few people dear to me who have died

would have been very much surprised if any one had called them so !

I believe my own mother was a real saint, but she died when I was a baby, so that I have never been in any conscious "communion" with her. And my poor young cousin, Cecil Halford, who was killed the other day, was not a "saint," although he was a dear, bright, manly fellow.

So that the phrase "Communion of Saints" sounds rather remote to me, and I cannot see how to make it mean anything to the class I have to teach. And yet one feels that it ought to have some meaning for us all now, when death and parting are so much in all our minds.

Practically, I think I might say that my difficulties resolve themselves into the two questions: How am I to understand this doctrine? and, How am I to teach it? If you are able, without too much trouble, to put me in the way of finding the answers, I shall be so very grateful.

I have been hoping and hoping to come and stay with Mrs Halford again, but now

that she has gone away for the winter it will be again postponed.

Apologising for troubling you,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

WINIFRED BARNES.

LETTER 20.—*From Dr Gray
to Miss Winifred Barnes*

DEAR MISS BARNES,

I am very glad to hear of you again, and that you remember your preparation for Confirmation.

It is always a pleasure to find that an old pupil is trying to cultivate some of the seed-thoughts sown in the mind, for that is all that we can aim at. After all it was the way in which our Lord taught the disciples.

On the great question as to the meaning of the words in the Creed, you have understood them rightly as referring to holy persons whose fellowship is cemented by fellowship in holy things, *e.g.* in the Sacraments. St Augustine uses both phrases,

“ Communion of Saints ” and “ Communion of Sacraments.”

But he had not the words in his Creed, and the ambiguity of the Latin “ *communio sanctorum* ” led some later interpreters, as I think wrongly, to translate it as neuter. For example there is an old sermon on the Creed, which explains it as the obligation of all the faithful to communicate every Lord’s Day! As far as we can make out, the earliest Creed which contains the Article is a private confession of faith which bears the name of St Jerome. The learned Benedictine scholar Dom Morin calls attention to the fact that they also occur in an old Armenian Creed, and he suggests that St Jerome derived them from an Armenian source during his travels in Asia Minor. He traces them back to the third century when Firmilian, Bishop of Cæsarea, supported St Cyprian and the North African Church in their strenuous refusals to recognise Baptism conferred by heretics or schismatics.

As St Cyprian puts it, that would introduce into the Church a “ Communion of evil

men." They wished to preserve only a "Communion of Saints." Neither Firmilian nor St Cyprian used the actual phrase, but this is the way in which it has come into current use.

At the end of the fourth century the words are found in the Creed of Niceta of Remesiana, in what we call Serbia, the writer to whom Dom Morin attributes the authorship of the Hymn *Te Deum*. He thinks that the words may have been brought into the old Roman province of Dacia to which Remesiana belonged, by Goths whose ancestors had learnt the Christian faith from prisoners whom they had carried off from Pontus and Cappadocia. Whatever the origin of the words, it is most interesting to read Niceta's comment on them.

"What is the Church but the congregation of all saints? From the beginning of the world patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and all other righteous men who have lived in our own time or shall live in time to come, are one Church, since they have been sanctified by one faith and one manner of life and sealed by one Spirit and so are made one body, of which Christ is the Head, as the Scripture teaches. . . .

“ In this one Church you believe that you will attain to the Communion of Saints. Know that this one Catholic Church is planted throughout the whole world, and that it is your duty to hold fast to its communion. There are false Churches, but you have nothing in common with them; they have ceased to be holy Churches, since they believe and act otherwise than Christ our Lord commanded and the Apostles delivered.”

I have made these quotations from a beautiful new book by Dr Swete, *The Holy Catholic Church*, which I advise you to read.

I will give you one other quotation, from the beautiful address on the Creed in the Sarum Order for the Visitation of the Sick, when the words “ Communion of Saints ” are said to mean that “ all men who live in charity are partakers of all the gifts of grace which are dispensed in the Church, and that all who partake with the righteous in grace while they are here, shall partake in glory in the life to come.”

But, you say, you want to be able to apply the words practically at the present time, and to see how they affect your own life, because you cannot call yourself a saint.

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Why not? It is your birth-right in the family of God. By your Baptism you are called to be holy, and the gift of the Holy Spirit for your strengthening in your conscious spiritual life at your Confirmation is God's pledge that you shall be enabled to live up to it. The feeling that you have failed to live up to your ideal does not alter the fact that it is still your guiding star. You seem to me to fall into a confusion of thought when you distinguish your mother, who has been described by you as a "real saint," from other people dear to you who while they were alive did not seem to come up to the same standard. That may be true. But the standard after all is not the high standard of your mother or even the yet higher standards of the holy Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the standard of the Saviour Himself and that is still, as the very greatest of the redeemed would acknowledge, unattained.

The question is not of achievement but of approach. Are we planting our feet day by day in His steps? Are we, at what-

ever distance, climbing upwards? As St Augustine says, so beautifully: "God looks upon us not as we are but as we are about to be" by His grace, when we open our hearts to Him that His Spirit may dwell in us and strengthen us with might.

Think of Cecil Halford, for example; was not his brightness a reflection of the light of Christ? His manliness, his self-sacrifice, are fresh in our remembrance. If he had not the making of a saint in him, I don't know what saintliness means! But I do know what his comrades thought of him as one who always would raise the tone of conversation in his bright, breezy way.

I can think of other women and men whom we might call rough jewels when we compare them with him, as we might call him a rough jewel when we compare him with St John the Apostle. But St John as a son of Thunder needed the cutting discipline which shaped his character till he reflected new beauties of the Divine Light that lighteth every man coming into the world. And the discipline of this terrible war-time is revealing a capacity

for self-sacrifice in many characters where we did not expect to find it. Thanks be to God.

I think I have said enough to help you for the present. Pray about it. Read the lives of good men and women of different ages, and you will never find it difficult to teach your children what the Communion of Saints means, all the prestige and the traditions of the holy family to which God has called us to belong.

Try to live up to it yourself, as you *have* tried, and you will find that the old saying is true—"Goodness can be caught, not taught." Clement of Alexandria has handed down a saying of our Lord, which is not recorded in the Gospels. "He that wonders shall reign, and he that reigns shall rest."

With my sincere prayer that the Holy Spirit will guide and teach you, and help you in your work for others, and above all in your own spiritual life.

I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

SERIES IV
CLAIRVOYANCE

LETTER 21.—*From Dr Gray's sister*

MY DEAR JOHN,

I rather expect that you will be receiving a letter from Elsie, about a matter upon which she and I do not see eye to eye, I am sorry to say; and as I am really very much perplexed about it, I want to ask your advice as to the right line to take. I feel that it is rather too bad to worry you, when you are so busy, but you know I have always come to you in my troubles, ever since the days when you used to mend my dolls' heads with sealing-wax, and stick their arms on again with stamp-paper! And now that Rob is away in Egypt I have really no one else to turn to.

I don't think that even you know that Elsie was practically engaged to that poor Alan Maynard who was killed in the September "push." They only settled matters just before he went out in August, and as Rob was

already out of reach, and they were such children, I insisted that nothing should be said until at least Elsie could hear from her father; and before Rob's answer came poor Alan was killed, and it seemed to me obviously best for Elsie's future that nothing should be said.

Of course it has been a terrible grief to the poor child, and at first it seemed as though nothing could help or comfort her. But during the last month she has been finding what she declares to be real consolation in some extraordinary meetings, to which she has been taken by a friend. So far as I can make out, they are a mixture of clairvoyance and prayer, attended by people who have lost their dear ones, specially in this war, and who long for some sign or message from them. These messages the clairvoyante gives, in some cases; and she gave one to Elsie, as from her Alan, which has comforted her immensely. So she insists upon going again and again (they are weekly meetings), and she certainly does look a little calmer, and not quite so desperately wretched. But

I cannot like the idea of these meetings, and I have told her so.

She insists that they can do no possible harm, since they begin and end with prayers—very long and beautiful ones, she says—and that it is the greatest possible help to her faith to feel that Alan is near her still, and that he is able to send her a message of love and protection. She declares that all which seems unreal and hard to lay hold of at our Church Services becomes wonderfully real to her at these meetings, and she wants me to come to them with her, and see for myself.

At present I can't bring myself to do that, and neither can I feel it right to bring too much pressure to bear upon the child, to keep her away. After all, she is twenty now, and—I don't feel at all sure I should succeed! I tried hard to get her to consent to my asking you and Mary to let her come to you for a little change; she is so fond of you that I thought she would like it, and it would undoubtedly do her good, but she will not hear of it. The most she would say was that perhaps she would write to you. "Uncle

John has a good deal of sense," was her tribute, which from the critical younger generation I suppose is high praise !

She is fairly well in health, though thin and pale, but she lives in a kind of dream, and spends all the time she can in her own room, surrounded by every photograph of Alan she has been able to collect.

What ought I to do ? Do advise me, dear brother, if you can.

Rob is all well, so far, but I fear his rheumatism is beginning to trouble him again. How are you all ? Give Mary my love, and tell her I will write a "home-chat" letter as soon as I have time. I mustn't make this one longer now.

With my love,

Your affectionate sister,

JANET LINDSAY.

LETTER 22.—*To Mrs Lindsay*

MY DEAR JANET,

We are grieved indeed to hear of this fresh tragedy. It shows how many more

sorrows are caused by the war than come to light. Poor Elsie ! This is indeed a crushing blow. I did not know much of young Maynard, but I know his father, for whom I cherish a great regard, and should have hoped for great things from his son. How mysterious it all is ! These two young souls just plight their troth and their hopes are cut off ! It is pitiful.

But I will wait for Elsie's letter before I write to her, and in the meantime pray.

I am very sorry to hear your account of her dabbling in Clairvoyance. Some clairvoyants are sincere enough, I believe, but it is so easy to confuse thought transference with revelation from the unseen world that I have little confidence in their communications. In some cases, I am confident, they are simply out for money.

My main objection to the whole system is based on the fact that I can find no place for it in the scheme of the Christian religion as practised all through the centuries. It seems to be the refuge of those who have no very firm hold on the fundamental truths.

There are strange psychic phenomena no doubt, which can be explained by thought transference. For example, if Elsie's mind is simply concentrated upon Alan as she knew him in the past, and her mind is sympathetic with that of the clairvoyante, she may unconsciously give out just the kind of message about love and protection which she wants to receive back, and just the stimulus which would enable the clairvoyante to give an extraordinarily accurate description of Alan without having seen him, which would confirm Elsie in her belief that she was receiving a communication from him. What you say about Elsie's dreamy condition makes me feel that the whole atmosphere of these séances is unreal and can only produce illusion.

I think you are wise in not forbidding her to go with her friend. The only hope is that if you can get her away for change of scene she will return to a normal state of mind, and may be encouraged to take up her usual occupations again.

Then she will find that her dreams are no

support to her soul in trying to help other people, and that she must seek our Lord in His own way, and draw from Him comfort about Alan and grace to live out her life in His service.

Don't you feel that with Elsie, and possibly also with yourself (you will forgive a brother's freedom of criticism), Church-going has been too much of an observance, a duty to be performed, pleasant when the music and the sermon were agreeable, otherwise not?

The true joy of worship is in the Presence of God our Father, to Whom we are brought by His Son our Saviour, through the indwelling Spirit.

We kneel before Him in penitence, that we may rejoice in His praise, hear His Holy Word, put before Him all our needs, sorrows, cares, with intercession for others. And above all in the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood we believe that our Lord is present with us to feed our souls, and to offer for us this Memorial of His Sacrifice upon the Cross.

If Elsie really believed this, do you think she would look anywhere else for consolation? Would she not be thankful to feel that in Him, who is the Resurrection and the Life, she is brought near to Alan, whom in the prayer of the Church Militant, she commends to His gracious keeping?

Instead of pining for a message from Alan, as he was, she would be thinking of him as he is, we are thankful to hope, in Paradise preparing for the great day when they shall meet again in the wonderful life of Heaven, when His servants shall see His Face, and serve Him, and He will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. When once this great hope in Christ had taken hold of her mind she would cease her morbid worship of Alan's pictures—I can't call it anything else, for it is that to which these séances tend—and would take a pleasure in the praise of God with the holy angels and all the redeemed. Then she would feel she must come out of herself to live for others, in a self-sacrifice worthy to

be compared with Alan's when he laid down his life.

I don't know how much of this I shall be able to say to her in answer to her letter, but with a mother's sympathy you can say it, if you can only by prayer break down the reserve which is keeping you apart. It is only a thin veil I know, because you have always enjoyed your children's confidence as few mothers do. But the grace of Christ is sufficient for this, and to Him I commit you in my prayers.

Your reference to our happy times together as children assures me that I shall not hurt your feelings by what I have said. Any way I must risk that, because I feel you can do more for Elsie than anyone else as Christ's missioner to her soul, if you can bring her to Him.

We won't forget Rob and his rheumatism. How you must miss him just now. Mary joins me in much love.

Your affect. brother,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 23.—*From Elsie Lindsay*

DEAREST UNCLE JOHN,

I expect Mother has probably written to you about me, but anyhow I'd like you to know. Alan Maynard and I were engaged on August 18th, and he was killed on September 26th, just three days before we got Dad's letter giving his consent. Mother said we must wait for that before we counted it an engagement or told any one, and I had been counting the days for it to come, so that we could tell everybody. And now there's nothing to tell, except that my heart is broken, and I don't think people ever believe that. They think one oughtn't to grieve too much, or that one will get over it. But you won't tell me that, will you, Uncle dear? for I just know I never shall.

But that isn't what I'm really writing about—it's this. The one and only thing that has helped or comforted me in the very least since Alan died has been some wonderful meetings I've been taken to by a friend. They're called "Prayer and Vision" meetings;

and they're taken by a wonderful woman who is a clairvoyante. She begins and ends with prayers—quite long ones, and so beautiful!—and she tells us when she sees some figure standing beside one or another of those present, and asks if the person concerned would like her to describe what she sees. The first time I went she asked me, and when I nodded (I was much too frightened to speak!) she said she saw quite a young figure in khaki standing very close to me, and then she went on to describe *Alan*—for it just *was* Alan himself she described, really and truly! She said he was bending over me, and he had a message for me, and should she give it? So I nodded again, and she said it was: “Tell her I watch beside her every night.”

You can't think how it has comforted me! Every night when I am in bed and it is all quiet and dark, I feel that he is watching there, and taking care of me. It's such a wonderful thought, and it makes the life after death seem so much more real than Church services do—if you don't mind my saying so.

So how can it be wrong or harmful ? that's what I want to ask you, dear Uncle John. Mother is awfully worried about it, and wants me not to go to these meetings any more, but she can't explain why I shouldn't, and—honestly—I can't myself see any reason ! They help me, and they comfort me, and they bring me nearer to Alan, and make me feel that we're not so utterly parted, although it's so awful to feel that I shan't ever see his face again !

And then this clairvoyante is evidently a good woman. She prays, you see, and she spoke so beautifully about it all last time, saying that she looks upon clairvoyance as just one of God's gifts to be used, and not buried in a napkin. Don't you think that's true ? and isn't it true, too, that the Church really doesn't help one much to keep in touch with those who have died ? At least, it doesn't seem to help *me*. It doesn't make me feel the least bit *nearer* to Alan, and this lady does.

I'm afraid you'll think it dreadfully wrong of me to feel like this about the Church, and

I'm so sorry, but I can't help it, just as I can't help hating the idea of coming away from home just yet. Mother wanted me to ask Aunt Mary to have me for a bit, but I do hope you and she won't think me ungrateful if I don't just now, because you know how I always love to stay with you. And *please*, Uncle dear, don't think I'm letting these meetings interfere with my religion in any way, because indeed I'm not! I go to Church on Sundays just the same as ever, it's only the week-day war-intercessions that I sometimes miss, and that's simply because the prayers at these meetings help me more. So don't you think that perhaps God is helping me in this way, through my love for Alan and my nearness to him, to know and feel more truly than I've ever done before that there *is* a life beyond the grave? Surely you would say that is a gain!

I promised Mother I would ask what you think about these meetings, but I do hope you won't say you think I ought to give them up, for I don't feel as if I could promise to do

that—not just yet, at any rate. But even if you think me very wrong, you'll remember that I'm very unhappy, won't you? and that I am always

Your loving niece and godchild,
ELSIE.

LETTER 24.—*From Dr Gray*

MY DEAREST ELSIE,

Aunt Mary and I are more sorry for you than we can say. One of the best things in life is true love, and to have your happiness spoilt almost as soon as it began is indeed a heavy blow. From all that I have heard about your Alan I should judge that he is one to whom your parents would very gladly have entrusted you, as the beautiful words of the marriage service put it, "to love and to cherish."

I say "is" and not "was" because I am glad to find that you think of him as living now, as caring for you still. But reading between the lines of your letter I do want you to go a step further, and think of him as he is

and not as he was. It is hard, dear child, to say it, but it seems to me that what is wrong with your "Prayer and Vision" meetings is the craving for just that vision of the "young figure in khaki" which is not what a Christian has any right to expect.

What has your clairvoyante taught you about him in his new life? Nothing. She has simply described him to you as you remember him. She could do it because your mind is so concentrated on him as he was, and your thought influences her thought, and the message is simply your thought of your gallant knight always looking out for you. I quite understand your feeling, and I don't doubt that he loves you just as much as ever.

Did you ever read that beautiful sonnet of Michael Angelo, translated by Wordsworth, in which he says—

" Love betters what was best
Even here below, but more in Heaven above."

But his love for you did not stand between him and his duty to his King. You would have despised it if you could have imagined

such a thing. And now you, too, must make a sacrifice, you must not let your love to him stand between your duty to the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings. Where do you think he is? Do you want him lingering here in this world of shadows, instead of picturing him with the Lord Jesus in the light of Paradise. You are not doing your duty to him if you don't pray for him in the Christian way, that he may have light and peace and rest. As St Paul puts it, to be with Christ is far better. And you have our Lord's own words, "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many resting-places." We are to be prepared for the future life of service, in the glorious resurrection body, and the faithful departed wait for us that we may be all perfected together. We have some reason to believe that they are shown what is going on.

Read in Hebrews xii. about the crowd of witnesses, and ask yourself whether in the light of Christ he would wish to see you surrendered to grief for the loss of him in

the flesh, when you can hope that he may be given back to you in the spirit.

I am not saying anything so stupid as "Don't grieve," or "you will get over it." Of course you grieve, and because yours is the true love you always will grieve till you go to him. But it must not be a selfish grief which unfits you for daily life, and comes, you know it, like a dark cloud between you and the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't know what kind of prayers your clairvoyante uses, but I feel quite sure from your letter that they have missed the mark in not bringing you nearer to Him Who alone has "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10), thus abolishing death.

I want you to go down on your knees and pray this prayer:

"Lord Jesus, Thou art the Resurrection and the Life, take care of my Alan. In Thee we are still united and shall live evermore. Help me to bear my sorrow and learn to pray for others, not for him only but for all his brave comrades, that they may have rest and peace, and for all who are near and dear

to them, that they may be comforted. For Thou art our Good Shepherd even in the valley of the shadow of death, Who didst die for us and rose again, and now livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit; one God, world without end."

I can promise you comfort, not by taking away, but by using your grief to draw you nearer to Him, and therefore to Alan who is with Him. And I am sure you will find it makes all the difference to you when you go to church. The services will have a new meaning, and especially the Lord's own service, when we "Lift up our hearts" to Him with "angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven," which includes all souls in the unseen world, therefore the waiting souls in Paradise.

Now I can come to your question about clairvoyance as a gift of God. It is a power of thought-reading which may be used or abused. The answer you give yourself, when you say it makes you feel nearer to Alan. No! nearer to Christ comes first.

That is what the Church has to teach you in your sorrow, and the dear Lord will comfort you with His Presence, and help you with His grace till He brings you also to His rest.

We shall be glad to see you whenever you feel ready to come. We quite understand your feeling not just yet. Remember your Mother needs you. She must be anxious about your Father. With much love,

Your affectionate uncle,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 25.—*From Elsie Lindsay*

DEAREST UNCLE JOHN,

I hope you'll forgive my waiting this whole week to answer your dear, kind letter—for which I do send *ever* so many thanks—but I wanted to read it over and over again, and try to carry out what you said. I have tried, with all my might, and thought and thought—I don't believe I've ever thought about religious things so hard, in all my life, as I have this last week—and the result has made me more unhappy than ever.

Because it shows me, not how much help there is in it all, but how little it all means to me!

That's a dreadful thing to say to you, I know—especially as you're a clergyman—but I do want to be honest, because it seems as if I'd got to a point where things have got to be *real* or *nothing*.

And that is just where my religion seems to fail me. You say that I ought to want to be drawn nearer to Christ rather than nearer to Alan, but I can't make myself feel that, although *indeed* I've tried!

My love for Alan means such a lot to me—everything, indeed—my love for Christ means so little when I come to try to lean upon it, as it were. It's as if the *real* love had shown me how *unreal* the other is, and yet you can't force love, can you? And if I don't love our Lord, and don't find comfort and strength in prayer and the Holy Communion, is it not rather a mockery to go on with what is *not* real to me?

I didn't go to my meeting this week, but I missed it dreadfully, and I want to ask you

if you don't think that perhaps these new ways and ideas may be God's manner of bringing home to *my* soul the comfort that other people find in Church services? You see, different generations do see things differently, don't they? I've often heard you quote Tennyson's words, that "God fulfils Himself in many ways," and as long as one doesn't give up one's belief in Him, does it matter if we don't all travel along the same road?

I *don't* want to give up my religion, or to be disloyal to the Church; I do hope you won't think that; but also I don't want to give up what *does* help me for what—just now, at any rate, does not.

I wonder if I may ask you a question about your own experience, Uncle dear? I know how dreadfully you and Aunt Mary must be always missing dear Cyril, although it's nearly four years now since he died. Even *I* seem to miss him all the time when I'm at your house; he was such a dear boy, and so tremendously full of go. And I know, of course, how splendid you both are, and how

much your religion means to you, so that of course you can find comfort in the thought of him waiting in Paradise.

But don't you sometimes feel that you want him beside you again, as he *was*, and not as he *is*?—I mean, as the dear laughing boy, and not the saint in Paradise? At least, it's silly to ask the question like that, because *of course* you must want him, simply heaps of times; but what I really want to ask is, whether, when you long for his presence, you don't ever feel that some outward sign is what you crave for most of all—just one little sight of him, or sound of him, or touch?

If you could feel his hand slipped into yours the way he used to do without saying a word or even disturbing you if you were reading, wouldn't it be more to you, in a way, than all the comfort Church and prayer can give? If you could even think, or *dream* that you felt it, it would bring back the past again, and make you think, for one moment, that you had your boy again. And if he, from wherever he is, could make you think or feel that, it would be a wonderful

proof, would it not? that he is able to be near you, and to know what you are doing, and love you just the same.

I've put things very badly, I know; and I've written you a dreadfully long letter, but you know when I was confirmed you told me that I could come to you as godfather as well as uncle, always, and I really do feel so troubled and puzzled about it all!

It seems as if my love for Alan has made me realise what a much less real thing my love for God is, and I don't know what I *do* believe and what I *don't*.

And the one thing I am certain about—that I want to go on with these "Vision" meetings—seems to be the one thing you are certain is wrong! So if you *can* help me any more, uncle dear, indeed I will try to use your help, even if I can't succeed. Because I'm very, very unhappy, and in a great fog about it all.

Ever your loving

ELSIE.

LETTER 26.—*From Dr Gray*

MY DEAREST ELSIE,

Your letter has grieved me because you don't seem to see the point of my argument. You say you have been thinking hard and I believe you always. Have you prayed as I asked you to do?

I am afraid that the root of all your difficulties is just this, that you have not learnt to pray in the light, and therefore you cannot pray in the darkness. You have not properly used the means of grace when you were happy, so your faith fails, and must fail you when things go wrong. Yet in the worst sorrow of all, our Lord, feeling Himself forsaken, cried "My God!" still, and His prayer was heard. The cloud lifted.

When you said your love to our Lord was unreal, because your love to Alan was real, I began to wonder whether I had been mistaken in thinking you were always an affectionate child. Think again. Has not your love to your father and mother been real? I am sure you will say "yes." And

when they brought you to be confirmed here did not the Bishop speak of love in our homes as the training ground for love in the Heavenly Home, so that all your respect and affection for your parents could teach you of the loving obedience and reverence which we owe to our Heavenly Father? And I saw your father sitting so erect and soldierly, and I thought how proud you must be of him, and I thanked God for the happiness of your home, and prayed you might be led in gratitude to offer yourself to God.

Dear child, I know you were in earnest then, but your letter proves that you haven't kept it up.

God's love was real, as your parents love was real, and your love given back was real. So it is not the fact that Alan's love was your first experience of real love, only you have let it make you a bit selfish, and forget all you owe to your father and mother, and selfishness shuts God out too. Let me ask you a plain question. What sort of loving message have you sent to your father about his rheumatism? He has to rough it

in Egypt, and has not you at hand to fetch him anything.

Have you tried to do anything to help your mother in her anxiety about him? For she must be very anxious about him at times, though she was always brave. And if not—what right have you to expect comfort from your religion?

It is quite true that different generations see things differently, but love is the one thing that never fails, and the test of all new ways of thought is in their ministry to love. Can you say that you come back from your meeting strong to do something for your lonely mother? If so, I could begin to think there was something in it.

But, if not—if what I say was true and you are sorry—our Heavenly Father is still waiting for you, and our Lord Jesus Christ died to save you from this selfishness which only makes you miserable, and the Holy Spirit can bring you the comfort He has brought to Aunt Mary and myself in our great sorrow.

Not that we don't miss Cyril, perhaps

more so as the years go by. But we don't want to think of him as a boy always. We want to think of him as growing, the same with his bright smile, but in training for higher service. I have dreamt that he had come back and was with me in the study, and when I woke it was to begin the day with an aching heart until I took my trouble to God. Then in the Holy Communion I can get near to him as he is, and gain courage to go on with the daily round. Life here is empty without him, but not the life to come.

I won't say more. I can only pray that the light will shine in your heart. Faith is more than feeling good and thinking hard. You must will to trust God,

“Who made the darkness and the light
And dwells not in the light alone.”

Always your affectionate Godfather,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 27.—*From Mrs Lindsay*

MY DEAR JOHN,

I am writing instead of Elsie, by her wish. I think she can hardly bring herself to put into words all that is in her heart—at any rate, not yet—and perhaps it is better so. She has had a hard battle to fight with her pride, poor darling, but she is grateful to you, and she wants me to tell you so; and I can thank you, too, dear brother, from my heart now.

At first, when Elsie got your letter last week, I don't mind owning that I was inclined to be a little vexed with you, for I could see that the child was distressed, although she said nothing about it for a whole day, and I did not like to try to force her confidence. But on Friday night, as I went up to bed rather late, I heard her sobbing in her room, and I made her let me in and tell me what the trouble was. I think she was glad to do so then, and she showed me your letter, and nestled against me as she used to do when she was little, and cried a good deal, poor

child, and said she supposed she was dreadfully wicked.

I think she wanted me to say you had been hard upon her, and I will own I was inclined to think so at first, when I saw how she was suffering, and felt how much she needed comfort. But I know you love the child very dearly, and so I felt I must try and trust your wisdom in dealing with her, and I just kissed her, and said she must ask God to show her how far your words went home, and suggested that we should say our evening prayers together, and ask for light and guidance, and then she must try and sleep.

She did get off to sleep quite soon, for I kept creeping in to look at her, but I had a bad night, and was rather knocked up next day—providentially, it seemed, for that broke down the last barrier of poor little Elsie's pride. She waited upon me all day, and in the evening we had a long, long talk, and got down to the roots of things together. For I had been thinking too—thinking over your letter to me, among other things! and I told her that I saw now that I had failed to

train her properly in her religion because my own was so imperfect, and now that we both felt so sorely in need of help we must make a fresh start to seek it together in the right way. The poor child broke down completely, but there was no more hurt pride about it, and she was chiefly grieving over the sense of having been neglectful of me and her father, to whom she owed she had hardly written at all lately—she had felt too wretched, she said.

We said nothing about her clairvoyance meetings, but I am pretty sure she will not go to them any more. She spent all Sunday afternoon writing to her father, and to Alan's mother, and other letters she had been shirking, and I know it was the result of the resolution she had made at the early Celebration, for as we went into church together she said, with a great effort: "Mother dear, you must pray for me, for I am going to try."

With all the love—and, I humbly believe, the confidence between us—we have never talked much of spiritual things, and it does not come easy to either of us. But, like poor

Elsie, I am going to try ! and we shall both go on looking to you for help. And meanwhile I do thank you, John dear, from the bottom of my heart. The surgeon's knife was the right instrument, though I hated seeing it used upon my child !

I am not pressing her to write to you, for now she says she would rather come to stay, so that she can talk instead. So I have asked Mary, in the enclosed note, if you and she will be good enough to have her for a little, if it is convenient. I would not come with her, in any case ; she would be better alone with you, and I should take advantage of the opportunity to go and visit Rob's invalid sister Elizabeth.

Oh ! these sad, sad days ! truly they set one seeking for the light of God's love, for there is so little other light from any other quarter !

Pray for us ! and we must learn to pray for *you*, more than I am afraid we have ever done.

Your affectionate sister,

JANET LINDSAY.

LETTER 28.—*From Dr Gray*

MY DEAR JANET,

Many thanks for your letter. We shall be delighted to see Elsie at any time. She will, perhaps, feel less constrained on arrival if you tell her that I have not said anything to Mary about her spiritual difficulties, but only about her bereavement. Poor child, if she could have known how much it hurt me to write to her sharply, she might have come through her struggle with her pride more easily. Now, thank God, we shall only have the task of building her up in the Faith, with the sympathy which we both feel more deeply than words can express. It was, indeed, God's gift of love to her father and you that pulled her through, and by His grace that will grow and help her upwards. Writing to him, and doing things for you, will be the best spiritual tonic.

I am so thankful to hear that through this tragedy you have been led to a firmer grasp of spiritual realities. I pray for you both,

that the Holy Spirit will lead you "from strength to strength."

With much love from us both,

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN GRAY.



SERIES V
SPIRITUALISM

LETTER 29.—*From Dr Gray to Miss Eleanor Johnson, a former parishioner who had lately been staying in the neighbourhood*

DEAR MISS JOHNSON,

I was very sorry that our conversation at Mrs Halford's was interrupted, because I wanted to explain more fully why I was so grieved to hear that you had begun to attend spiritualistic séances.

As you put it, you are "seeking after light." But you must beware lest you seek after light other than "the light which lighteth every man coming into the world." Can you not say with St Paul: "Christ has brought light and immortality to light in the Gospel?" Or, to quote St John again: "The true light now shines." In our Risen Lord we have life and light, and the teaching of the Holy Spirit about the condition of the faithful departed in the New Testament sums up for me all that we can hope to learn, or should

wish to know, about those who have passed within the veil.

You acknowledge that the new light of which you spoke is only to be gained through a medium. Is not this a very dangerous principle to set up, as trenching on the fundamental doctrine that there is "only one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus?"

The mysteries of the unseen spiritual world must necessarily be unintelligible to us in our present condition. Surely the symbolism of the Apocalypse of St John implies this. And St Paul, speaking of a mysterious vision which had been granted to himself, says that he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Cor. xii. 4). This is a tone very different from the glib, unrestrained descriptions of the life beyond, which some spiritualists profess to receive. What guarantee have you that the explanations given through modern mediums, less manifestly blessed than the Apostles Paul and John, are in any degree accurate?

I am not saying anything against the good faith of the medium in whom you have been putting your trust. I am only asking you very solemnly to consider whether you have not been thereby disloyal to our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has first claim on your allegiance, and Who is treated so unworthily by all the spiritualists with whom I have had any conversation. They are pleased to regard Him indeed as a medium. That is to surrender the whole position. I am thankful to think that they do not address any prayers to Him; for to do so from their point of view would be flat idolatry.

Do you see now what danger you are in through keeping such company? I most earnestly pray that you will renounce it, and seek for light where you once found it, and be content to learn that our dear ones in Paradise are safe with Christ. But we must be content to walk by faith, not by sight. I am certain this is the reason why He does not grant us the communications from them for which our human spirits naturally crave. I am content to trust Him.

But if you think that I misinterpret your position, please come and see me, that we may talk it over.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 30.—*From Miss Eleanor Johnson*

DEAR DR GRAY,

Thank you so much for your kind letter which has just been forwarded to me by Mrs Halford, as alas! I had left before it came. I had to get back to London that same evening. I am so very sorry, for I should have been so glad to have another talk with you instead of writing. I am afraid I am not good at making things clear by letter, but I must try, because I feel so sorry that you should think me in any danger of being disloyal to my religion.

Indeed there is no such fear! On the contrary it means a great deal more to me than it ever did before. "Things unseen" are more real, and the spirit world is nearer, and my faith grows stronger instead of

weaker through the experience of these "circles"—for indeed I think they can scarcely be called "séances!"

They are just little gatherings of earnest seekers after truth and light, conducted by a lady who has wonderful psychic gifts which surely are just as much gifts from God as any others? We begin sometimes with a hymn, sometimes with a reading from the Bible. Last time, *e.g.*, she read us passages from those exquisite chapters in St John's Gospel where our Lord is taking His last farewell of the disciples, and I, for one, realised the beauty and the pathos of them more than ever before. She read them quite beautifully, and so reverently, and then just said a few very simple words, showing how the Master prepared His followers to look beyond the grave, and to continue their intercourse with Him after He had passed to the other side. And then she reminded us how He had appeared to them after His death and burial, and had taught them to hold converse with Him still. So, as she said, surely we have the highest

possible example for striving to keep in touch still with our beloved ones who have "gone before," and for refusing to recognise death as separation?

I have written this down just as one instance out of many I might give, to show you how truly Christian this teaching is, and to prove that there cannot be the danger in it that you fear, for one's faith. If you could only hear some of the messages that have come sometimes from those who have passed over—speaking of the happiness of being able still to minister to those on this side, and pleading with us, oh! so earnestly, not to shrink from them or to lose touch with them through cowardice or narrow vision.

"Be not afraid, only believe!" was one message—again from the Bible, you see. It seems that they cannot make things clear to us all at once. As you said in your letter, we on this side of the grave cannot enter fully into the conditions of life on the other side. One has to be taught and trained by degrees, and gradually accustomed to the

spirit-atmosphere, and then the light begins to come.

You say it may not be true light—but how can it be otherwise if it comes through such truly spiritual channels, and from the Bible, which after all is God's own word?

I can assure you that most of the messages are partly, if not entirely, in Bible words.

Then, too, with regard to what you say about Church-going; far from interfering with this, it has made it a great deal more real to me than it has been for a long time past. I am afraid that I have not been a very frequent Church-goer for some years; simply because I had not time, as you know, to come to church except on Sundays. And since I came to live in London, where one does not seem to belong to any one church, as one did to the dear old parish church, I am afraid I had got a little bit slack about Sundays, too.

Not that I had ever meant to give up my religion in any way, but simply because—if you will forgive my saying so—church-

going did not seem to help me, or to touch on the point on which I wanted light. But now I often go into a church on week-days and on Sundays too—sometimes when it is empty, sometimes when there is a service going on—and I feel I *want* to go, and not that I am there just as a duty.

I am conscious, as I never was before, of the spiritual atmosphere of it, and of the presence of those who have passed over. Only last Sunday I went to an early Celebration, and in the quiet of the morning hour the church seemed full of spiritual presences—among them, I knew, some of those whom “I have loved long since, and lost awhile.”

You have warned me against false lights, and I am grateful for the warning, which I shall remember; but surely it applies to every advance into the unknown, in any direction? There is always the risk of being mistaken or misled, and one has to take the risk in order to make any advance in knowledge; it surely is the price of every triumph of modern science! And if only you could *feel* the atmosphere of these circles,

and hear the high and comforting, and truly inspired and inspiring messages which often are vouchsafed to us, I am confident, dear Dr Gray, that your prejudice against these really wonderful gatherings would vanish into air.

Would it not be only fair to gain some experience of them at first hand before you condemn? Forgive the suggestion! and please forgive this long letter also. Your own kindness has evoked it, together with my earnest desire to prove to you that these new lights are not in any way conflicting with the old. You have been so good a friend, not only to myself, but also to my dear mother until she passed beyond the veil, that I am anxious you should not think that I am in any way disloyal to my faith. On the contrary it is more real to me than it ever was before.

Yours sincerely,

ELEANOR JOHNSON.

P.S.—If you ever would consider coming to one of our circle meetings, I know I could arrange it, and I so gladly would.

LETTER 31.—*From Dr Gray*

DEAR MISS JOHNSON,

As you say, it is much easier to talk than to write. But your letter, for which I thank you, has made me feel more uneasy about you than ever.

You say you are not disloyal to your religion. Perhaps not, for you seem to claim the right to make it what you please. But that does not acquit you on the charge of being disloyal to Christ. Do not think that I am harsh and intolerant in saying this, for it grieves me to say it.

But I can put no other construction upon the extraordinary explanation which your circle leader put upon the chapters in St John's Gospel. She seems to assume that the intercourse which the disciples held with our Lord after His Death was exactly parallel with the intercourse which Spiritualists claim to have with departed friends now.

Surely this is to ignore the Resurrection, and the intercourse of the Great Forty Days when He appeared to them and prepared

them for His Ascension, and for the coming of the Holy Ghost who was to enable them to endure without His visible Presence. The vision subsequently granted to St Paul at his conversion and at the great crises in his ministry, as to St John in the prison of Patmos, only bring into relief the normal experience of the Church. They were confident that He was with them invisibly all the days, and content to have communion with Him only in the Spirit until called to join Him in Paradise.

Your friend's teaching leaves no room for St Paul's emphatic assertion that He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. i. 4). She whittles away the doctrine of the Resurrection to a mere series of appearances of a disembodied spirit of no more value than the appearance of your dear mother might be. You know that *she* would have shrunk in horror from such a thought, but that is the logical inference from the statements in your letter.

Those chapters in St John xiv.-xvi. are full of teaching about the Holy Ghost. How is it that He is not invoked at your meetings? At least so I gather. Then I remember St Paul's words: "None can say that Jesus is the Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. xii. 3). I can only conclude that the disastrous refusal to give our Lord His rightful place as the only Mediator between God and man, is due to the denial of the Holy Spirit's claim to guide us into all truth, so definitely promised (John xvi. 13).

How is it that in none of the earliest documents of the Christian Churches, the Epistles of St Paul and the Acts of the Apostles, there is the slightest shred of evidence that they sought for any communications from the unseen world such as you crave for? They believed firmly enough that it existed, that the powers of the age to come (Heb. vi. 5) were at their disposal through the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and the use of the means of grace which the Lord had provided. Modern spiritualists seem to have outgrown such

primitive practices. But the historical fact remains that the picture of the corporate life of the holy Church in the New Testament corresponds in outline to the experience of communicant life in the Church to-day, without one gap into which you could claim to insert séances such as you describe.

I maintain, therefore, that I have the gravest reasons for asserting that such teaching so far from being as you say, "truly Christian," is utterly wrong and perilously near to sin against the Holy Ghost.

You go on to speak of the messages from those who have passed over and plead with us not to lose touch with them. I cannot imagine St Paul as saying that. His great concern may be described as keeping in touch with Christ ; to be with Him is "far better." He will restore us to those that have gone before. What do your messages say about Him ? I have taken pains to read a book purporting to be a collection of such messages, and I can find no single new idea. The writer has learnt the Catechism, but speaks

of our Lord as Master and Brother, and the greatest of mediums, in a very condescending way which implies a low idea of His Godhead. His simple "non-sectarian" teaching is held up to admiration without any sense of the futility of thus minimising His claim on our allegiance to His Person.

Reference is made to the Holy Spirit whose work is apparently only to prepare the mind to benefit by the ministrations of departed friends who long to be our guides. All doctrines are at a discount, all creeds are man-made and useless. Yet in a little while the love of God is insisted on as a key to all knowledge, without recognition that this is the key to the Christian's Creed, for the revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is the proof of the love which moved the Father to send, and the Son to come, and the Holy Spirit to dwell in the holy Church. The Creed is not man-made but God-taught. What is above all missing here is a true understanding of the death of Christ for our sins, for the text about drawing all men unto Himself is quoted as if it had no relation to

His "lifting up upon the Cross." There is a glowing account of the vision of our Lord Jesus, vouchsafed in the homes of the Blest, which inspires the conviction, "How badly I have served Him!" but none of St Paul's passionate gratitude for His Cross and Passion, or St John's reasoned belief that "the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

I am sadly afraid that my arguments will fail to persuade you, because you set up your own judgment as arbiter to decide what sort of teaching is truly inspired. But I can claim that it is not my judgment but the judgment of the whole Catholic Church which you thus oppose. And I deprecate very sternly the airy way in which you speak of the Bible as "*after all* God's own word." Surely Shakespeare is right when he says "The devil can quote Scripture to his purpose." Any system of false doctrine can be bolstered up by isolated texts torn from their context.

But you say that the new teaching has given you new joy in worship, and that at

an early Celebration you were conscious of the presence of departed friends.

Surely in the Holy Communion we can gain a strong hold on the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. But it is only in proportion as we concentrate our thought upon the Presence of Christ while we offer to God the Father this memorial of His Son's Sacrifice, and humble ourselves to receive the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. Thus alone shall we receive grace and power to become like Him and worthy of the fellowship of His Redeemed. I entreat you to consider whether your vague reflections about their presence did not distract your attention from the greater thought of His Presence?

Finally you ask me if it would not be only fair to gain some experience of the séances of which you tell me, before I condemn. This is a fair challenge, but there is a fallacy in the argument. You left off attending our services because Church-going did not seem to help you, so you make the value of your experience the measure of truth. But

I do not make my religion merely the sum of my personal experience. My religion is that which binds me to God the Father, through His Son, in the Spirit, and that revelation is guaranteed for me by the experience of all the Saints.

Our private illusions are our own. If others think as we think, and feel as we feel, we can dismiss the idea that our organs of perception are unsound. You may say that your new friends confirm for you the truth of your new belief, but that is not the same thing, for they too are building upon the shifting sands of subjective experience, whereas the Church builds upon the Rock of the Revelation in Christ. I could not come without disloyalty to my fundamental convictions. So I bring you back to the first point from which I started—what does loyalty to Christ demand? That we should set our affection on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, not on any lower sphere, where human spirits like our own, still fallible, even if delivered from the burden of the flesh, are not, as the

Prayer-book would put it, in joy and felicity, but in restless yearning to return to earthly companionship in order to convince us that they are still living! Why, we knew that before! The words of our Lord to the Sadducees of His day convey a stern warning: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living: ye do greatly err" (Mark xii. 27). To Him, not to them, do I look for inspiration, because through Him I have found pardon and peace.

My earnest and frequent prayer for you is that you may return to Him from this false way, which can only delude and disappoint your hopes, degrade your intelligence and disarm your conscience. For your mother's sake, and by the remembrance of her simple and stedfast faith, I entreat you—think it over again, pray for guidance, and the light of Christ shall shine in your heart through this fog of a new superstition.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 32.—*From Mr Philip Gardner,
a young widower*

DEAR DR GRAY,

I want to thank you for your great kindness both to my dear wife and to me, through those nightmare days of illness that came like a bolt out of the blue, and in the awful blank after her death. I do not know what I should have done without your help in arranging the funeral, and it was all just as I feel she would have wished.

I meant to have called to thank you in person before I came away, but I was so busy over the hateful work of sorting, arranging, and putting away, and then my people would insist upon hurrying me off here with them. I did not want to come, but they meant to be kind, and it did not seem worth while to stand out. Indeed nothing seems much worth while now that Lucy is taken from me. I simply do not feel that I can live without her.

“ Why should you ? ” asks a man staying here, who is an ardent spiritualist. He is absolutely convinced of the possibility of getting into communication with the departed ; indeed he declares that he himself has done so ; and he offers to take me to ■ séance at which I might be put in touch with my dear wife again. He is obviously sincere, and very sympathetic ; he understands how much it would mean to me to get some message—even the slightest—from her again ; and I own I am more interested than I ever thought I could be in that sort of thing. I have never been disposed to take spiritualism seriously.

I wonder what your opinion is about it all, and whether you could tell me of any useful book on the subject ? I have more than enough time for reading in these long days, and often longer nights, and in spite of my friend’s sincerity his are obviously *ex parte* statements, and I should like to look a little further into the matter for myself. It is too bad to trouble you further ! and if you cannot help me, please do not think of answering this.

Perhaps, too, you will think I ought to be content with the comfort religion can give, and so no doubt I ought; only the weak point is that it does not comfort me! No Church Services or forms of words bring me nearer to my darling, so that if some other method can, it seems at least reasonable to try it, or at any rate to find out what it has to offer.

Again, many, many thanks in the name of *both* of us.

Yours very sincerely,

PHILIP GARDNER.

LETTER 33.—*From Dr Gray*

MY DEAR GARDNER,

I often think of you and pray that you may be comforted in your terrible bereavement. Suffering under a sudden shock like this it is no wonder that you should feel attracted by the specious promises of spiritualists.

But you must not, as Tennyson would put it, "make your judgment blind." You

have already anticipated what I am going to say about "this sort of thing." Only, before I say it, let me remind you that my idea of the comfort given by religion is not a mere abstraction, a set of soothing words, but a gift of grace from the Saviour Himself.

You remember how, while your dear wife was breathing her last, we prayed to Him to receive her spirit. You know how faithfully she tried to live "in Him." "In Him" you are still united by the Communion of Saints, and in His own Service, our Holy Eucharist, you can still draw near to her with all other spirits of just men and women departed in His faith and fear, when you draw nearest to Him.

Now about Spiritualism. The art of necromancy, of obtaining information concerning future events by communication with the dead is as old as the days of King Saul. But it has only flourished in obscurity, and the experiment has often led others, as it led him, to despair. I fully believe that communications are received from the unseen

world by those who have what we call the psychic faculty. But the evidence, so far as I have been able to test it, does not prove that spiritualists get into touch with discarnate spirits at all—I mean spirits of dead men and women.

You will find spiritualist literature full of warnings against “the living spirits” about which the Bible also contains such definite warnings. Whether these are discarnate spirits or evil angels may be left for the moment an open question. What the spiritualists say is that if frivolous, merely curious, people get into a circle, at the time when they try to obtain communications, they attract spirit intelligences like their own, who may take a malicious interest in deceiving. I am assuming that the motives of the medium in such a case are above suspicion, although the trade in such dealings have been from time to time so profitable that many charlatans of the worst type have taken it up for gain.

It is strange that repeated exposures have not repressed credulity. But we must judge

any system of thought by its best not by its worst. And it stands on record that a medium so respected as the Rev. Stainton Moses, who was a clergyman of the Church of England, was at one time on the point of breaking off all his activity in Psychical Research because he was so appalled by some of his experiences. There is evidence, I believe, that some characters have been terribly influenced by a flood of foul and evil thoughts goading them into an immoral life, and in some cases insanity. Sceptics would trace insanity throughout such cases. But this does not explain everything.

I am convinced that a great deal can be explained by telepathy, the transference of thought by suggestion from one mind to another, both conscious and unconscious. That enables a thorough-going materialist to dismiss the whole body of evidence as empty superstition. Neither you nor I, however, can accept this theory of the mysteries of life and death. And if we live on the threshold of an unseen spiritual universe there remains the possibility that

spirits of another sphere, discarnate or angelic, may under certain circumstances hold communication with our spirits.

There is a wonderful avenue of reflection opened out by the modern theory of the sub-conscious mind, in which are stored up by memory all manner of thoughts and impressions, and I can readily understand how a spirit from the unseen world might gain possession of our most secret thoughts if the barrier of natural reserve had been broken down under a kind of hypnotism. Self-revelation might easily be mistaken for revelation from the unseen, illusion pass into delusion.

To such delusions I attribute the fact that Mr Moses lost his faith in the chief doctrines of the Christian Creed. And the utter confusion which reigns among the systems of spiritualist thought is bewildering in the extreme. As a French author (Anatole Berthe) puts it: "When we look at these spirits more closely, one discovers with no small surprise that they are Catholics amongst Catholics, Protestants amongst Protestants,

Jews amongst Jews, and even Materialists among Materialists." I quote these words from a thoughtful book on "The Dangers of Spiritualism" by a Roman Catholic, Godfrey Raupert,¹ who gives records of personal experiences, from which he recoiled in horror. (Since you ask me to recommend a book on the subject, I am inclined to suggest this one.)

It seems that in Paris and Buda-Pesth the spirits teach reincarnation; in England and America they deny it. But to simple questions concerning the after-life they only give contradictory answers, although they profess to be enlightened. "All this makes it too evident that the spirits are either practising deliberate deception, and make it their object to mislead and to mystify their disciples, or if they are really human beings who have lived on the earth, that they have no definite truth of any importance or value to communicate to us."²

My own faith is centred in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I cannot at any

¹ p. 136, 3rd edition. Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.

² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

cost surrender it for a vague opinion which at the highest regards Him as a somewhat superior Medium acquainted with many secrets of Nature, in advance of His age, who by His spiritual insight gained an influence over His generation which may be superseded.

He is "the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever." We know that He can save us from our sins in this brief life of probation, and this is far more important than any knowledge which He has not thought fit to reveal about His method of educating the souls of our departed friends whom we entrust to Him.

Believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 34.—*From Philip Gardner*

DEAR DR GRAY,

How good of you to write so fully in answer to my letter! I think you must have guessed how much I long for anything

to distract my thoughts, and I can assure you that I have read your letter many times over, with the deepest interest. I shall not attempt to answer it properly though, until I have read the book you mention, which I have sent for.

Meanwhile I have been hearing some very striking evidence on the other side, so to speak, from my spiritualist friend Carter, who, by the way, stoutly denies that attendance at a séance need result in any disturbance of religious belief. On the contrary, indeed, he urges that to have come into actual communication with the spirits of the departed makes it easier to believe in the reality of life beyond the grave, and to accept the evidence for Christ's own appearances after His death—which would certainly be a gain so far as I am concerned, for my beliefs on all these points are vague, to say the least of it. It is not exactly that I disbelieve in Christ's Resurrection, but—forgive me if I shock you!—it seems not to help or affect me very much, just now. Granting that He did rise from the grave, how is that fact

going to bring my dear one back to me, or give me any sense of nearness to her? But if these spiritualists can bring me some actual message from herself—if they can make her speak to me, still more if they can make me see her face—why, then, I have gained a certainty of the after-life, which is surely better than a belief! You will agree with me there, will you not?

The actual question of my going to a séance does not press, for Carter tells me his own particular medium will not be available until next month. So I shall have plenty of time to read this book and to weigh the arguments for and against, which I promise to do carefully before I commit myself. But I must own the idea attracts me more than anything else does at present.

I shall be back on Monday week at my house—I can't call it home now!—and shall hope to come and see you.

Yours very sincerely,

PHILIP GARDNER.

LETTER 35.—*From Dr Gray*

MY DEAR GARDNER,

Many thanks for your letter. I am glad that you will get Raupert's book, and read something about spiritualism before you go to a séance. You seem to me to be craving for something which should make faith unnecessary. You demand that the future life should be really a continuation of the present, on the old lines. So that if you could see your wife and hear her speak, again and again, it would only make the separation harder between times. And it would really involve an act of faith in the medium employed before you could arrive at any certainty that you were not being influenced by suggestion or hypnotism. Our Lord's words to St Thomas: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed" are not easy to understand, still less to accept, but they are the answer of Divine Wisdom to all mourners who, like yourself, chafe at the barriers which hem us round in this world of things seen.

You seem to think of Christ's Resurrection as an event in history, which if it could be proved to your satisfaction would not bear any necessary relation to your life. The Apostles saw Him again, as you might wish to see your wife. That is all. But that is not the view they took when they had time to think, when they had also had teaching from Him about it. His Resurrection stood in intimate relation to His death, and these events were of intensely practical importance to their souls.

Read again St Paul's great chapter, 1 Cor. xv., and note how the whole emphasis lies on the argument, "if Christ be not raised your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." They trusted in Him as the Redeemer of Israel. They found that He could only redeem the race one by one, that it remained for each disciple by personal faith to accept His salvation, dying with Him to sin, that they might live with Him in newness of life. Their Gospel of the Resurrection was from the first indissolubly bound up with their message of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Can you say that this message is meaningless for you? I am sure that your words to me on the day that she died, about not having been worthy of her, had a deeper meaning than you supposed. It is a proof of true love to think this, and I respect you for it. But it is also a proof that in your relation to God, from Whom all love is derived, you have failed to reach the standard of character which an enlightened conscience demands.

If you could see her again as she was, you would still feel unworthy. But if you could hope "in Christ" to become more worthy of her love, you would have the highest hope of re-union hereafter on equal terms. Thus I believe that your loss might lead you to a point of view which you will be thankful above all things to attain, when the sense of sinfulness humbles us to the dust, and the assurance of pardon alone brings peace. This alone will cure that terrible restlessness of which you spoke to me. As St Augustine put it long ago: "Our heart is restless until it finds rest in Thee."

I know it will cost you many a struggle, as it has cost me. Believe me it is worth while. Day by day to know that He is leading us on, till He shall call us to re-union with those who have gone before, brings real comfort.

I don't know that I have anything to add to my warning against Spiritualism as such. I wish to lay stress on the lack of all proof that it is really the departed friend with whom a spiritualist medium puts clients in touch. It is possible that evil spirits may counterfeit the dead.

I pray for you often that you may be led to see the light and may have the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

I shall just miss you when you come back on Monday, as I shall be away for ten days from Saturday, taking a mission. After that I shall hope to see you.

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

LETTER 36.—*From Mr Gardner*

DEAR DR GRAY,

I hardly know how to tell you what has happened, and yet I feel I owe it to you to try, after all your kindness in writing. I was just trying to make up my mind how to answer your last letter, and how to tell you that I *could* not give up any chance there might be of getting a message from my wife, at any risk, when the message came! At least, so it seems to me, though many people might call it a mere coincidence.

It was certainly very simple. I thought I had gone through all Lucy's papers, but in pulling out one of the drawers of her writing-table, when I got back last night, I found that a few letters had got pushed behind, and among them one to me, sealed, and marked to be opened only after her death. It was written two years ago, from the nursing-home where she went for that serious operation she had to undergo. She wrote the night before, just after she and I had said good-bye with a half feeling, which neither of us acknow-

ledged, that it might be our last good-bye in this world.

Part of her letter—about our life together, and about our happiness, and our little one who died—I could never let anyone read but myself, but I am enclosing one sheet which I should really like you to see (I know you will return it safely), because it fits in so extraordinarily with what you have said, that there seems something more than chance in its turning up just now.

I feel that I have received the message I asked for, straight from herself. She had added a few lines, after she got well, to say how thankful she was, and that she would leave this still to tell me, when she was gone, all that she feared she should never have the courage to say face to face. It hurts rather, to feel that I had made her feel afraid to say anything she wanted to me, but I daresay I should not have understood. Indeed I do not understand now, any more than I understand clearly what *you* mean when you use these same expressions about union, and meeting, and prayer, “in

Christ," and "with Christ," and "through Christ."

But I see that you *do* mean something, and that she did too, and that it was something very real to her, and very precious, so I want to try and get hold of it if I can.

I don't at present see my way to making any definite promise about spiritualism; but I will undertake to give *her* way a fair trial first, if you will be good enough to help me. Lucy asks me, in her letter, to go to you if ever I want teaching on these matters; she says you have made them so much more clear to her. It is not a thing one can tackle by letter, but when you come home, will you let me come for a talk sometimes, and see if you can put me in the way of finding what both of you seem to have found, of strength and comfort in the thought of Christ? I may not succeed, but for her sake I want to try. It brings her so extraordinarily near to me, getting this message, written from the grave as it were, in her dear hand.

Yours gratefully,

PHILIP GARDNER.

[LETTER-SHEET ENCLOSED]

“ . . . It is hard to write words which you will only read when I am gone, but although we shall be parted then, I know that I shall love you still, then and for ever. And you will know—at least, I do beg you to believe it, for I am *sure*—that we can still meet together ‘in Christ,’ in prayer and at the Holy Communion,

“ ‘ For in the Eucharist I touch
The Hand that touches thee.’

“ Will you try to meet me there, dearest Love, sometimes? You don’t care very much about going, I know, and alas, it is partly my own fault, for if only my life were less unworthy of my Lord you would not find it so hard to know and love Him. So may I ask this one more thing of you when I am gone, and my failures do not hide Him from you any more? You love Him already, I am quite certain, better than you know, and I want to ask you to give Him the chance of teaching you to love Him more.

“Oh ! my love, I am saying this so badly ! words seem so useless, somehow—I feel as if I could never make you understand ! But our dear Lord can, and He will, if you will only seek Him out. Do you remember, in those happy days when we were first learning to know each other, what a lot of time and trouble you used to spend in meeting me at different places, and getting to know the people I was with ? If you hadn’t done so, do you think you would ever have come to care for me enough to want to make me part of your life ? And now that I shall have gone out of your home to be ‘with Christ,’ won’t you take a little trouble to seek me out in His Presence ?

“I don’t see how we are to keep really near to one another except in Him, for you could not go on mourning me for ever ; truly I would not have you do so, my dearest. I used not to be able to bear the thought of your being happy some day without me, but since I learnt to love our Lord a little better, He has taught me to trust Him with my love for you. In Him our love will

surely comfort and help us both for ever, whatever may be the conditions of our lives on different sides of the grave. . . .”

LETTER 37.—*From Dr Gray*

MY DEAR GARDNER,

Your letter has deeply moved me. Many thanks for your confidence in letting me see your wife's words, which I return. Indeed it is a mercy that your timely discovery of the letter should have saved you from taking a step, which might have led you far astray. I do not doubt for one moment that your wife's prayers for you have been heard, and that you will be led to see the truth as it is in Jesus.

You must not let your mind brood over the painful thought that she was afraid to speak to you of some of her deepest convictions. There is more than one plane in the life of friendship which is the perfection of married life. On the lower planes your mutual confidence was complete. Believe that our Lord can make known to her that

her dearest hope has been fulfilled, and that you can join her on that higher plane of conscious union with Him. From stage to stage it is true that "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love Him." If it is so in this life, how much more hereafter?

I shall be delighted to see you on my return, and give you all the help I can. The teaching that we can give from the pulpit often fails because it is too general, and assumes too much. If men would only brace themselves to come and ask for instruction on the particular points on which they stumble, they would help their parish priest as well as themselves. He would be less like a man "drawing his bow at a venture." But in my experience it is less often difficulties in the way of faith than indifference which lays hearts open to the assaults of error. The attractions of new forms of faith—New Thought, and all the other specious titles by which the unwary may be beguiled—soon pale in "the light of the knowledge of

the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

A Mission with all its hopes and fears, its disappointments and its unexpected and wonderful results, is always a testing time for the missionary as well as the congregation. I wish you could see the rows of pitmen sitting together at the back of the Church here, night after night. The spirit of expectancy is wonderful. May the Holy Spirit give us grace to reap the harvest.

I was speaking to-night about Prayer. It is the test of true conversion of heart: "Behold he prayeth" (Acts ix. 11).

It is the avenue to all spiritual progress. Prayer to "Our Father" can never be selfish. Will you pray for me and for all those men who are seeking after truth, even as you are? Pray in your own words that they may have the moral courage to confess Christ before men. That is the witness to which He is calling them. Their difficulties may be very different to yours, but the goal is the same, "through the Cross to the Light." Such

prayer will lift you into another atmosphere, in which you will find it easier to take up your cross of sorrow, and follow Christ.

There is another thing that I want you to do before we meet. Read quickly through the Gospel of St Luke, written for a Roman official, a man of the world, His Excellency Theophilus, who had become a catechumen. St Luke wished him to know "the certainty concerning the things in which he had been instructed." So he put together the best materials which he could collect, in a simple and beautiful biography of Christ.

It is pre-eminently the Gospel of Prayer. He alone records the Parable of the Publican's Prayer. Like St Matthew he records the Lord's Prayer, but he alone points out that our Lord prayed on six memorable occasions, when he was baptized, when He cleansed the leper, when He called the Apostles, at His Transfiguration, on the Cross for His murderers, and with His last breath. He shows how the Lord laid stress on the duty of unceasing prayer (xviii. 1, xi. 8, xxi. 36),

and on the necessity of storming the Kingdom of Heaven by violence in our prayers, in the parable of the Friend at midnight (xi. 5-13), and of the Unjust Judge (xviii. 1-8). Illustrations so homely will raise wonder in your mind that our Lord should not have been afraid of taking risks lest He should be misunderstood. But that is the glory of the Christlike life, to take risks. We need so much more of the spirit of adventure, that we may find out for ourselves that it is supernatural grace alone which can uplift and uphold us. Then you will understand why it was in the darkest hour that He looked forward and instituted for all future generations the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood, the continual memorial of His sacrifice, which should not be in vain. And you will linger over the story of His appearing to the two disciples going to Emmaus (man and wife they may have been, though this attractive theory is not proved), to whom He was able to explain why the Christ must suffer and enter into His glory, accepting their invitation to abide

with them, and making Himself known in the breaking of bread.

You see how the Gospel brings you at last to the point on which your wife lays stress. Through all the centuries this has been the blessed experience of the faithful. You are not alone in your quest. You have behind you the garnered experience of the saints, and may enter into their fellowship of suffering with Christ, through which they are also glorified together.

I cannot say more, my heart is too full. I can only pray in the beautiful phrase of an early writer, Justin Martyr, that "the gates of light" may be opened for you, the light that shall shine more and more on your daily path unto the perfect day. *Laus Deo!*

Yours always sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

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